GLADIATOR II WICKED SMILE 2

TOTAL FILM

SALEM'S LOT AND THE BEST STEPHEN KING MOVIES

'It's the darkest thing I've done'
COLIN FARRELL

EXCLUSIVE!

JOKER FOLIE À DEUX REVIEWED

RIDLEY SCOTT ON THE ART OF DIRECTOR'S CUTS

THE PENGUIN

THE BATMAN UNIVERSE EXPANDS IN GOTHAM'S GRITTIEST CHAPTER YET

HIMESH PATEL
EMILY WATSON
DISNEY'S RED-HOT SLATE

ANORA
LUPITA NYONG'O
THE REAL SUPERMAN

FUTURE

Who ya gonna call?

Ghostbusters

40th anniversary screening with live orchestra

Get tickets

Sat 26 Oct

Schirmer Theatrical

100 YEARS COLUMBIA PICTURES

Royal Albert Hall

© 1984 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Welcome to

TOTAL FILM

THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE

Franchise expansions are 10 a penny these days, and I'm as cynical as the next person when it comes to universe-building for the sake of it, where IP-flavoured grist is thrown at the content mill. But *The Penguin* – spun from the world of Matt Reeves' *The Batman* – feels different.

For one, it's an extension of one of the most thoughtful comic-book reboots in years, which proved there was plenty of life in Gotham's streets after a risible stretch of the DCEU. It also helps that Reeves is directly involved, with this gritty crime saga directly following on from his 'Year Two' take on the Dark Knight, and leading nicely into his sequel. Best of all, it's a chance to spend more time with Colin Farrell's Oz Cobb, a scene-stealing highlight who was very much a supporting player in *The Batman*'s sprawling drama. If he considers it worth going under the make-up again (and risking getting zero credit, given how truly unrecognisable he is), that makes me think there must be something truly worthwhile in *The Penguin*, and Jamie Graham's cover feature has only raised my anticipation further.

But, if you're looking for more than franchise fare, I think this issue shows just how wide-ranging *TF*'s tastes are. We've gone big on *Anora*, the Cannes-storming wonder from director Sean Baker, who we've been championing from *Tangerine* to *The Florida Project* to *Red Rocket*. Sir Ridley Scott's telling us about his three-and-a-half-hour director's cut of *Napoleon*, in his only interview on the subject in the entire world. We're diving in depth into the career of one of our finest actors, Emily Watson, who's still delighting with her range in two very different upcoming projects: Irish historical drama *Small Things like These* and TV's *Dune: Prophecy*. And for horror fans, we're digging deep into the latest Stephen King adap, *Salem's Lot*, and looking into the best movies spun from the master author's bibliography. It's an expansive issue that we hope will enrich your viewing horizons.

Enjoy the issue!

Matt

MATT MAYTUM, EDITOR
@MATTMAYTUM

CALL SHEET
THIS ISSUE'S EXTRAS

EDITOR-AT-LARGE
JAMIE GRAHAM
@JAMIE_GRAHAM9

Loved chatting to everyone involved on *The Penguin*. Clancy Brown assured me that Colin Farrell's Oz Cobb will be as iconic as *Highlander*'s Kurgan. There can be only two?

DEPUTY EDITOR
JORDAN FARLEY
@JORDANFARLEY

A thrill to have a supersized chat with Sir Ridley Scott about his expanded director's cut of *Napoleon* and his relationship to editing. It's well worth a revisit on Apple TV+, if you have 205 minutes going spare...

NEWS EDITOR
LAUREN MILES
@LAUREN_M1LES

It was fantastic covering the D23 convention in Anaheim, California. The entertainment showcase featured so many famous faces, but I was genuinely star-struck by the presence of The Dude, Jeff Bridges.

REVIEWS EDITOR
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM_MATTL

My summer holiday in Sweden came with an unexpected dash of Hollywood glam: Kiefer Sutherland and his band gigging at the local theme park!

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
NEIL SMITH

Had a great time exploring the *Laika: Frame x Frame* exhibition at BFI Southbank. Full to the brim with puppets, sets and props, it's an eye-popping tribute to the stop-motion maestros.

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
JAMES MOTTRAM
@JAMESMOTTRAM

Spoke to Sean Baker for *Anora*, in his first interview since the film won Cannes. He was sleepy – he'd just got up – and kept apologising for long answers, but this is a man at the top of his game.

Contents

#355 OCTOBER 2024

THIS ISSUE

30 THE PENGUIN
Colin Farrell, Matt Reeves and co. track Oz Cobb's violent rise to the top of the underworld. P-p-p-pick up this Penguin.

42 ANORA
Sean Baker's on-the-money Palme d'Or winner about a Brooklyn sex worker marrying a Russian oligarch.

46 SUPER/MAN
The high-flying Christopher Reeve doc that reveals the hero beneath the cape.

50 RIDLEY SCOTT
As the 205-min cut of *Napoleon* rides in, Ridley talks us through the art of the Director's Cut.

54 HIMESH PATEL
Yesterday's man, today's star in *The Franchise* and *Greedy People*.

58 SALEM'S LOT
Bloody hell: the Stephen King vampire flick that's risen from the grave. Plus the best King adaps ever.

EVERY ISSUE

3 EDITOR'S LETTER
Celeb anecdotes a-go-go from the *Total* team.

68 TOTAL FILM INTERVIEW
Actor Emily Watson looks back on *Breaking the Waves* and *Punch-Drunk Love*, and forward to *Dune: Prophecy*.

112 DIALOGUE
This month's postbag: *Deadpool & Wolverine*, rejigging *Rogue One*, and stars tucking into sandwiches in airports.

TEASERS

7 WICKED
Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande embrace the witching hour.

11 WILLIAM TELL
Will the straight-arrow hero be the apple of viewers' eyes?

12 GLADIATOR II
Ridley returns with his swords 'n' sandals ('n', er, sharks!) sequel.

15 LFF PREVIEW
Wanna know what to book at the London Film Festival? We've got you.

19 SMILE 2
Can you survive this horribly happy sequel?

20 TIMESTALKER
Alice Lowe explains why her dark romcom is right on time.

23 TERRIFIER 3
Gore blimey. Art the Clown is dreaming of a red Christmas.

29 LUPITA NYONG'O
The Oscar-winning *Us* star lends her larynx to *The Wild Robot*.

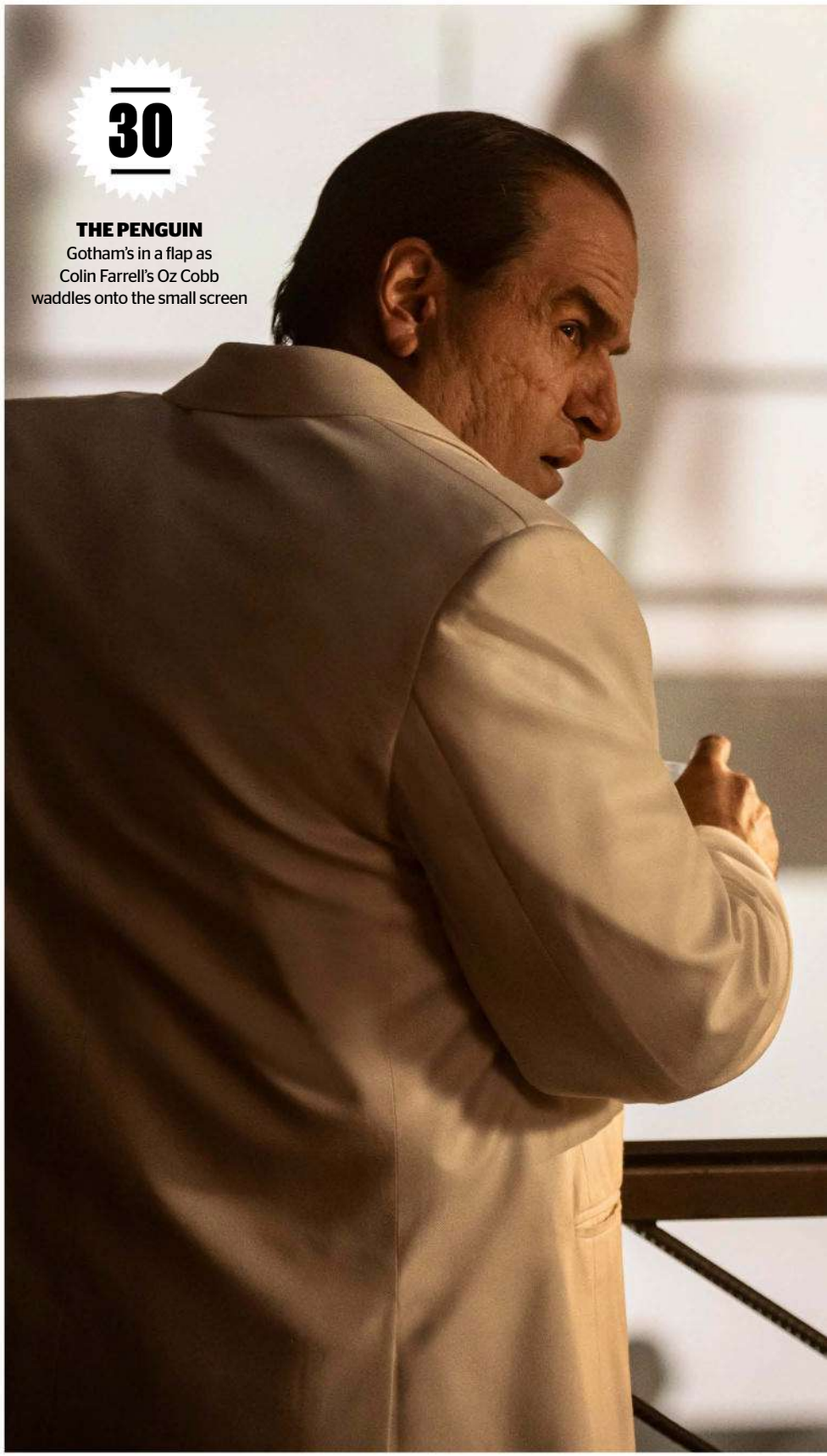
TOTAL FILM BUFF

101 10 OF THE BEST
Fourth-wall breakers! From Bond to Bueller, things can only get meta.

102 FLOP CULTURE
Why there wasn't much box-office meat on 2009's *The Lovely Bones*.

104 GOLDEN GRAHAMS
Our Jamie on an unseen Jenna Ortega gem.

109 GENA ROWLANDS
TF pays tribute.



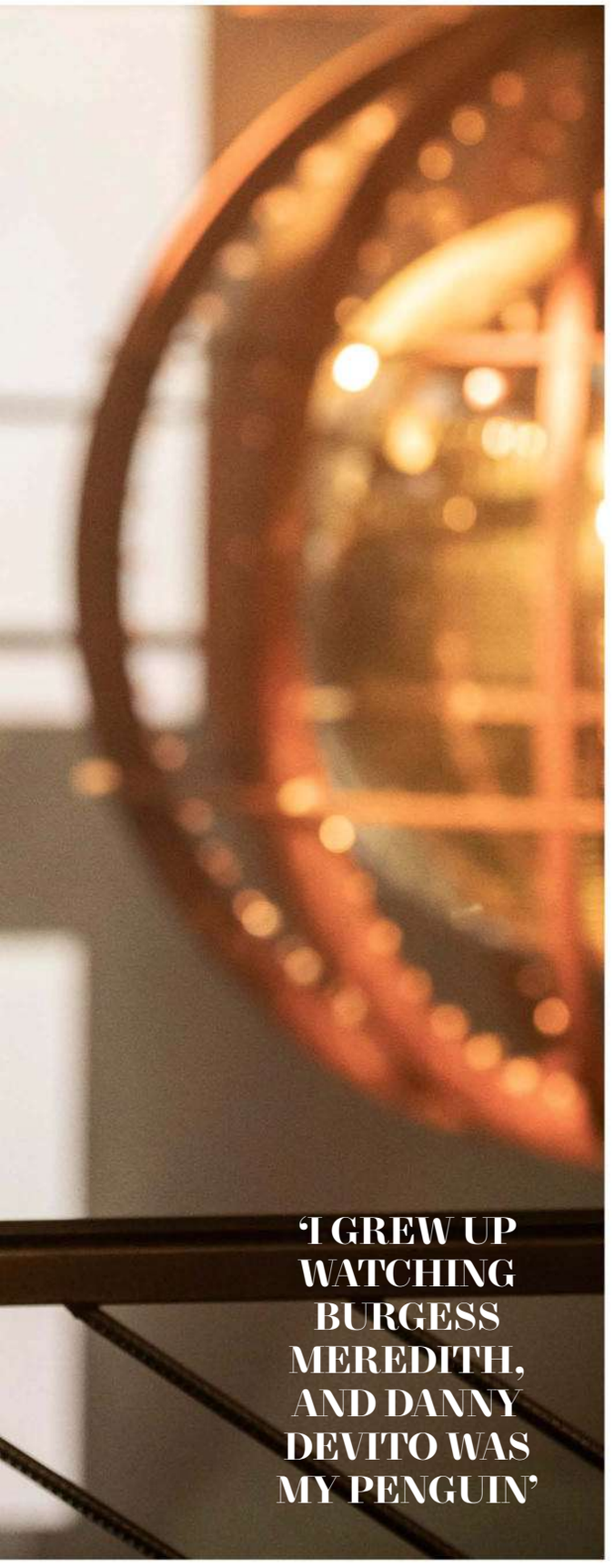
30

THE PENGUIN
Gotham's in a flap as Colin Farrell's Oz Cobb waddles onto the small screen

SCAN TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

7



‘I GREW UP WATCHING BURGESS MEREDITH, AND DANNY DEVITO WAS MY PENGUIN’

46

54

58

68

SCREEN

78 SPEAK NO EVIL
Does the horror remake get a tongue-lashing from our reviewer?

80 A DIFFERENT MAN
Sebastian Stan’s thriller that could leave you a changed person.

81 MEGALOPOLIS
‘A highly readable review of Coppola’s latest’, says *TF Contents* (honest).

82 JOKER: FOLIE À DEUX
The DC baddie finds his (singing) voice. Luck be a Lady Gaga tonight?

84 THE SUBSTANCE
Demi Moore discovers her best self in a body horror for the ages.

85 STRANGE DARLING
Why you should chase up this cat-and-mouse serial-killer thriller.

86 THE OUTRUN
Saoirse Ronan excels in an unflinching study of a recovering alcoholic.

87 WILL & HARPER
Will Ferrell hits the road with an old pal who’s newly transitioned.

88 HELLBOY: THE CROOKED MAN
Big Red alert! The super-handy superhero goes back to the 1950s.

89 MY OLD ASS
Meeting your future self? Cracks are sure to appear.

92 RERELEASES
Nolan’s *Interstellar*; Biggs is ‘inter’ apple pie...

95 TV
Down a wormhole to a 90s sci-fi classic.

98 BOOKS
Get your ass to this page!

Recycle your magazine and seven days later it could come back as your newspaper.

recycle

www.recyclenow.com

The possibilities are endless.

EDITED BY
LAUREN MILES
@LAUREN_M1LES

TEASERS

RETURN TO OZ

WICKED Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande defy gravity as the Broadway smash reaches cinemas.

Jon M. Chu is transporting us back to the world of Oz for his adaptation of the Broadway phenomenon *Wicked*. It's something the *In The Heights* director has dreamt of for a long time, and it's coming to fruition as not just one film, but two, due for release in consecutive years.

'I just remember being blown away by how cinematic it was,' Chu says of seeing the stage show for the first time. 'I loved, emotionally, how it moved me, the relationship between these two women.' The two women in question are Elphaba – an ambitious girl born with green skin, who's better known as *The Wizard of Oz*'s Wicked Witch of the West – and Galinda, who would later become Glinda the Good in the famous 1939 movie. *Wicked* offers a revisionist spin on the classic story, portraying Elphaba as purely misunderstood.

It's a tale that Chu found transferred extremely well to the screen, given the central themes of friendship. 'You get to do the close-up; we could be there right with the girls,' he says. 'In a weird way, it brought the audience more in line with what the story was telling – this very intimate story of the relationship between these two women that's very complicated and nuanced.'

What's also very complicated is the world of Oz, with its bold and colourful design. 'This is such an iconic place in our literature and in our cinematic history. Designing it is a lot of pressure,' Chu explains of bringing the world to life. 'We have a combination of VFX and physical builds, but the physical builds were huge!'

That's something he credits to production designer Nathan Crowley who, the director says, isn't shy of ambition. 'He's really good at pushing the studio to allow us to do things, to build a giant head that could talk in real time. He's the one who's like, "We've got to plant nine million tulips."'

Elphaba: wicked, or just misunderstood?

He's the one who said, "We've got to build a train, a real 16-ton train." It's what makes the movie different. It's what allows people to escape to a new place they've never been to.'

To inhabit that place, you need two leads with great chemistry – something that took a while to find. In fact, Chu never thought Cynthia Erivo's Elphaba and Ariana Grande's Galinda could exist in the same film. 'Each of them did chemistry reads, but with different actors. And by the end, I was like, "Did I pair this wrong? Because Cynthia's Elphaba and Ari is Galinda,"' he recalls. Because of their busy schedules, they met for the first time on set, and the director knew that he'd finally found the right combination.

He's also full of praise for their individual performances, describing Erivo as 'such a presence'. At first, though, he was unsure if the actor could portray all sides of Elphaba. 'Elphaba has an innocence, almost an awestruck look and feel to her when she's thinking about wanting to meet the wizard. I didn't know if Cynthia had that side of her,' he says. 'When she came in and she sang *The Wizard and I*, it was like she just was yearning, and you could see her as a little girl, yearning to prove herself to the world that she belonged, and her singing with that kind of innocence, it inspired us all.' Although, he adds, he wasn't necessarily casting the roles based on the actors' voices. 'To me, music in a musical should feel like when words aren't enough, these characters have to sing. And it's not a thing you put on. It's not a separate piece of the movie. It's how they literally express themselves when they can't do it in any other way.'

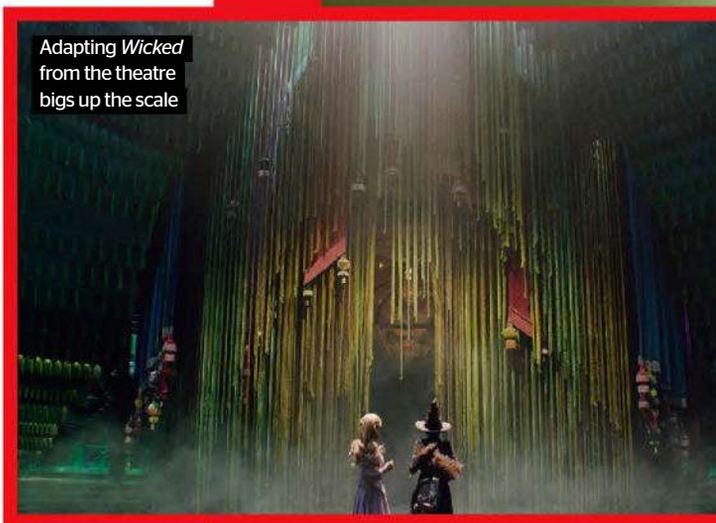
With pop icon Ariana Grande taking on the role of Galinda, it might be easy to be distracted by the star's presence in the film, but Chu says that Grande positively disappears into the character. 'I haven't seen her engross herself or commit herself to a role like this. By the time she showed up on our set, I didn't have to do much. She was already Galinda,' he says.

'For one of the most famous faces and personalities in the world, for someone you think you know so much about, you will not recognise her. You will only see Galinda. That was shocking to me, because that means she had to learn a lot of craft really quickly, and she had to feel very comfortable doing it and not be self-conscious doing it. And she did that. She's a bona-fide movie star.'

Wicked's clearly a story that Chu's passionate about and, having been performed on stage since 2003, a story that connects deeply with audiences. 'It was prophetic in a weird way,' the director says, 'about truth; about propaganda; about the stories we were told as young people, and what it feels like to grow up and strip those baby stories away, and start to look at life, and how complicated and nuanced life is. That maybe there isn't a yellow brick road that's leading you along the way. Maybe you have to take the unbeaten path. Maybe there isn't a wizard there to save you. Maybe you have to save yourself.' **LAUREN MILES**

WICKED OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 22 NOVEMBER.

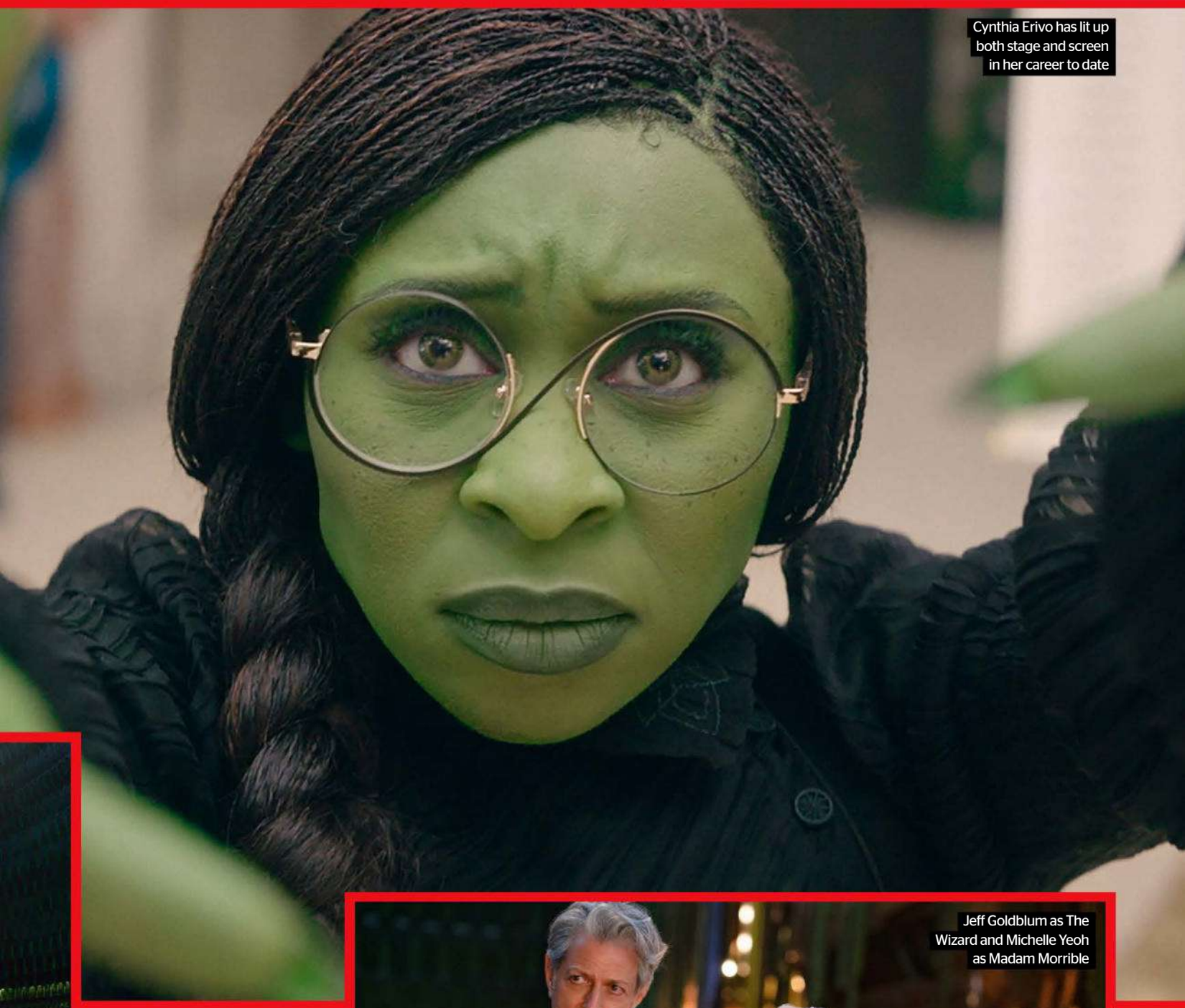
'Music in a musical should feel like when words aren't enough, these characters have to sing'
JON M. CHU


Adapting *Wicked* from the theatre bigs up the scale

Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande on set with Jon M. Chu

UNIVERSAL PICTURES

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS



Cynthia Erivo has lit up both stage and screen in her career to date

Jeff Goldblum as The Wizard and Michelle Yeoh as Madam Morrible

HOT RIGHT NOW

MILLIE BOBBY BROWN IS STEPPING UP, BIG-TIME.

At just 20 years of age, Millie Bobby Brown has already starred in the global phenomenon *Stranger Things*, produced and starred in multiple feature films and written a debut novel alongside ghostwriter Kathleen McGurl. If that wasn't enough to put her on the map, Brown's now set to produce a feature adaptation of that novel. Titled *Nineteen Steps*, it's a love story set against the backdrop of World War Two. The feature should further cement Brown as Netflix's biggest star, with reports saying that the young actor is also looking to take on the leading role in the film – a character based on her grandmother.

Playing the telekinetically gifted Eleven in Netflix's *Stranger Things* shot Brown to stardom, and since then the actor has become one of the streamer's go-to talents. Since the show first aired in 2016 she's shown herself to be a likeable presence on screen, but also someone who aspires to have more of a hand in the creative process, too. She's credited as a producer on 2020's *Enola Holmes*, a movie following the adventures of Sherlock's younger sister as she solves mysteries, battles misogyny and breaks the fourth wall in Victorian England. That was successful enough to spawn a sequel and an upcoming third instalment.

Alongside starring in the big-budget, Russo brothers-directed sci-fi saga *The Electric State*, Brown's upcoming slate also includes non-genre projects adapted from the novels of female writers – unsurprising given she recently told *Glamour*, 'When I'm around women, I feel empowered and inspired'. She'll star in and produce *The Girls I've Been*, playing con artist Nora O'Malley, while *The Thing About Jellyfish*, based on Ali Benjamin's 2015 novel, will see Brown play a girl grieving the loss of her best friend, retreating into a world of imagination as she theorises that her drowning was caused by a rare jellyfish sting.

Straddling blockbuster fare and more intimate projects focused on female-centric stories, it's no wonder Millie Bobby Brown continues to be one of Netflix's major draws. **LAUREN MILES**

THE ELECTRIC STATE STREAMS ON NETFLIX IN MARCH 2025. NINETEEN STEPS, ENOLA HOLMES 3, THE GIRLS I'VE BEEN AND THE THING ABOUT JELLYFISH ARE TBC.

GETTY

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

Connor Swindells embraces the chance to play a screen baddie

EXCLUSIVE

BIG APPLE

WILLIAM TELL Get ready for a fresh take, with Claes Bang wielding the famous crossbow.

For a legendary folk hero who united Switzerland, popularised the crossbow and inspired a timeless overture, William Tell hasn't exactly set the silver screen on fire. Yes, the Friedrich Schiller play from 1804 has been filmed numerous times, while 1953's *The Story of William Tell* would have seen Errol Flynn portray him… had Jack Cardiff's directorial debut not run out of money. For all that, the tale of Tell – capably served though it has been by television, theatre and Rossini's 1829 opera – hasn't enjoyed the cinematic exposure that the likes of Robin Hood and Zorro have had. Indeed, it is surely telling that Rossini's *William Tell Overture* is now better known as the theme music for *The Lone Ranger*.

Claes Bang plays the crossbow-wielding hero

High time, then, for a star-studded, action-packed epic dedicated to this iconic and perennial figure, complete with a gripping dramatisation of his most celebrated exploit – the shooting of an apple off his beloved son's head. That is what awaits us in *William Tell*, described as 'a classically filmed, classically acted film with a beautiful, three-act structure' by writer/director Nick Hamm (*Driven*, *The Hole*).

'The great movies of this genre – the Kurosawas, the Ridley Scotts – combine character and narrative in such an epic way you've got a recipe for something fascinating,' Hamm continues. 'It's another world of filmmaking, with horses and swordsmen and massive, complex action sequences.'

Set in Switzerland in 1307, *William Tell* envisions its title character (*Dracula*'s Claes Bang) as a veteran of the Crusades, who now seeks a quieter life as a huntsman, husband and dad. When his fellow citizens face oppression from the forces of neighbouring Austria, though, he is compelled to take a stand – a course of action that sets him on a collision course with Gessler (Connor Swindells), vindictive viceroy to Austria's cruel and rapacious ruler (Ben Kingsley).

'It's great playing a nasty piece of work like Gessler, because the possibilities of what you can get away with are endless,' smiles Swindells, aka *Sex Education*'s Adam. 'I never thought I would get an opportunity like this in my career, so I've taken every minute of it with pure joy.'

'I never thought I would get an opportunity like this in my career'
CONNOR SWINDELLS

With Ellie Bamber, Emily Beecham and Jonah Hauer-King also in the cast, Hamm's latest boasts an array of rising British-born talent. (The more seasoned Rafe Spall and Jonathan Pryce also feature.) It is Denmark's Bang, however, who's been tasked with giving life to a mythical icon who, seven centuries on, continues to loom large in our collective imaginations. 'If people know this story, what they know is he shot an apple off his son's head,' the *Bad Sisters* star reflects. 'I suppose the story is what leads up to it, isn't it?' **NEIL SMITH**

WILLIAM TELL WILL OPEN IN CINEMAS SOON.

CROSSBOW FILMS LTD

EXCLUSIVE

NO PLACE LIKE ROME

GLADIATOR II Ridley Scott returns to the Colosseum in 2024's most anticipated sequel...

A follow-up to the all-conquering *Gladiator* (a box-office titan that also bagged five Oscars, including Best Picture) has been mooted since way back, but it's never quite worked out. Director Ridley Scott tells *Teasers* an attempt was made as recently as four years ago, but: 'It didn't work. I said, "Nah, this is not working." And we all bailed out.'

The idea – from Scott himself – that proved key to cracking the sequel was to focus on a relatively minor character from the original: Lucius (played there by Spencer Treat Clark). 'I thought, you know, the only surviving member of *Gladiator*, frankly, is the son, Lucius… And, of course, Lucilla [Lucius' mother, and daughter of Marcus Aurelius] is still a survivor, and is surviving within the context of the ever-corrupt world.'

Here, the grown-up Lucius is played by Paul Mescal, who exploded to stardom in TV lockdown hit *Normal People*; he has since focused on emotional, character-driven film material, with *Gladiator II* his first blockbuster. Scott – a director and producer so prolific you could accuse him of being a workaholic – keeps a notebook with him whenever he's watching anything, registering actors, writers and directors of interest. 'And I wrote down, "Paul Mescal in *Normal People*." I watched the whole bloody thing, and I thought, "Whoa!" because

'I don't know how you do it without going back into the Colosseum'
RIDLEY SCOTT

AIDAN MONAGHAN, PARAMOUNT

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

it's not my kind of show, but I was hooked on watching both Paul and [co-lead Daisy Edgar-Jones].'

There was also something 'physical' in the casting. 'He looks a little like Richard Harris [who played Marcus Aurelius],' says Scott. 'And somewhere in there is the Irish thing – the fire that the Celts have. And I liked that a lot.'

In the film, Lucius has grown up in Numidia on the North African coast, far removed from his lineage. After a Roman invasion, he's enslaved and, like Maximus before him, fights as a gladiator on Rome's cruellest stage.

'You go through all the questions,' says Scott. 'Can I go back to Rome? Can I go into the Colosseum again? Because we did that with Russell [Crowe]. And the answer is: you better be in the Colosseum because it's called *Gladiator*. I don't know how you do it without going back into the Colosseum, otherwise there's no point in doing it.'

That's not the only way in which *Gladiator II* is repeating history. Scott wants to remind audiences that this isn't storybook stuff – it actually happened, and its impact has echoed through the ages. 'People think that history is something that didn't happen,' he says. 'By God, this happened again and again… I tried to bring back a little bit of that history into a reality, and not a fantasy.'

MATT MAYTUM

GLADIATOR II OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 15 NOVEMBER.

YOU TALKIN' TO ME?

FILM QUOTES POSE AS QUESTIONS. FILM STARS TRY TO COPE.

IN THE CROSSHAIRS THIS MONTH... ADEEL AKHTAR

You talkin' to me?
Yes, I am talking to you, and what a pleasure it is to do that. I'm sitting in my garden and the sun's out; the weather's nice, and I can't wait for the next question!

Why don't you tell me the story of your life?
I was born in Hounslow. Mum and dad moved out to the suburbs, then my dad told me to do law. I did that and didn't like it, so then I went to drama school. Then I got out of drama school and was out of work for years, then found work when I was in my 30s, started paying my bills. I'm 43 now, so I'd say it's been a good sort of 10, 12 years of being a working actor.

How much can you know about yourself if you've never been in a fight?
Quite a bit, because not getting into a fight takes a lot more than getting into one. It's quite easy to get into fights, but actually to stay out of a fight is really difficult. I don't really have much of a problem with that, because my face looks quite sorry for itself. Nobody ever really tries to start a fight with me!

So what are you afraid of?
Missing an opportunity, whether that's in life, the missed opportunity for having a good conversation with someone, or a missed opportunity whenever I'm on set, and I come home and think, 'That could have gone a bit better. I should've done it this way.' I did *Utopia*, where my character started to become the head of this thing called The Network. At the time I looked at it and I thought, 'Oh, man, there's loads of missed opportunities there. I should have played this scene that way, and that didn't build into that.' But now I look back on it and I think, 'You know, it's alright.' As I'm getting older, I'm getting a bit easier on myself.

Who's more foolish, the fool or the fool who follows him?
I would say the fool that follows him is the more foolish because the fool is showing you how not to be, and if you follow what the fool is doing then that makes you more foolish. You're not working with any awareness.

We all go a little mad sometimes. Haven't you?
Oh yeah. I've been a little bit mad when I was out of work. Ten years I wasn't working. I felt like I was a tiny bit crazy, because I really wanted to do this job that I thought I was good at, but wasn't really given an opportunity. That can make you a little bit mad at times, wondering whether it's worth pursuing, especially when you're working in bars when all you really want to be doing is acting.

Why do we feel it's necessary to yak about bullshit in order to be comfortable?
I'm definitely guilty of that. If there's an open space that nobody's filled with words, I will definitely fill that space to try and feel as comfortable as I can, but also minimise other people's uncomfortability as well. I'm working with some people at the moment and we're sending lots of voice notes to each other. They started out being very polite, 30-second voice notes. Now we've gone up to like nine minutes, just because I think it's really enjoyable to chat.

What's your favourite scary movie?
I saw *Hellraiser* at a stupidly young age – I think because the older boys were watching it – and for some reason, whenever I see images of that fellow with the pins in his head, it still terrifies me to this day! I was a kid of the 90s and we had a Blockbuster down the road. I would just get out all these films on VHS and watch them – *Halloween*, *An American Werewolf in London* – all the ones which were so shocking that they were funny, almost.

Is a Wookiee a bear?
It's difficult to know, isn't it? About [*Four Lions*], I've done quite a bit since then. When I was telling you I was out of work and then suddenly I did this thing that helped me start paying my bills, that was it. That was *Four Lions*. It's quite nice to finish on that quote because that was when people started recognising me as being an actor worth hiring. [Making that film] went past like a bit of a fever dream. I was such a fan of [director] Chris Morris and wanted to please him and make sure it was worth him hiring me for the job. I was so terrified of that all the time; it was quite a high-stress situation. And there was no way of working out what the tone of the script was because it felt like it was so crazy. I've learned now that that's the mark of a good script – the fact that you can't easily put it into a category. I feel *Four Lions* is definitely like that. **LAUREN MILES**

In the upcoming second season of *Showtrial* (top) and as Lestrade in *Enola Holmes 2*

SHOWTRIAL S2 AIRS ON BBC1 IN OCTOBER.

ALAMY, BBC WORLD PRODUCTIONS/PETER MARLEY

QUESTIONS TAKEN FROM: TAXI DRIVER, WHEN HARRY MET SALLY, FIGHT CLUB, CREED, STAR WARS: EPISODE IV - A NEW HOPE, PSYCHO, PULP FICTION, SCREAM, FOUR LIONS

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

BLITZ

Steve McQueen's (*Small Axe*, *Widows*) historical drama is the festival's opening film. It stars the fantastic Saoirse Ronan as a distraught mother searching for her missing son in World War Two-era London. Said son, the defiant George, is played by newcomer Elliott Heffernan, with his character finding himself in peril after running away from the countryside home he was evacuated to in an effort to return to his family. Starring alongside Ronan and Heffernan are Harris Dickinson, Stephen Graham and Erin Kellyman. With McQueen's track record we can expect this to be hugely moving. **LAUREN MILES**

THE 68TH BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL TAKES PLACE FROM 9-20 OCTOBER AT VENUES IN LONDON AND ACROSS THE UK.

FESTIVAL PREVIEW

LONDON CALLING

LFF The most exciting films screening at the BFI London Film Festival...

NIGHTBITCH

Director Marielle Heller (*A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*) turns her hand to comedy horror with the Amy Adams-led *Nightbitch* – about a woman who believes she's turning into a dog after leaving her job to be a stay-at-home mum. Based on the book by Rachel Yoder, the movie sounds like a surreal viewing experience, and the protagonist looks to be one of the more challenging roles Adams has taken on in recent years. Scoot McNairy plays her character's husband.

JOY

A British drama chronicling the development of IVF and the first 'test-tube baby', *Joy* stars Bill Nighy as surgeon Patrick Steptoe, Thomasin McKenzie as nurse Jean Purdy and James Norton as scientist Robert Edwards. Together they work throughout the 60s and 70s to develop life outside the womb. The screenplay comes from Jack Thorne and marks the feature directorial debut of Ben Taylor (*Renegade Nell*). Later this year, after its festival screenings, *Joy* will be streaming on Netflix.

A REAL PAIN

Jesse Eisenberg writes and directs for the second time after 2022's *When You Finish Saving the World*. With *A Real Pain*, he also takes on the leading role of David. He and his cousin Benji (Kieran Culkin) take a trip through Poland to honour their grandmother, but it doesn't go smoothly – old tensions between them resurface as they remind themselves of their family history. Having premiered at Sundance, early reactions have been positive, with praise especially being heaped on Culkin.

PIECE BY PIECE

A Pharrell Williams biopic animated in the style of *The Lego Movie*? What more could you want for a festival's closing film? A singer and record producer, Williams is taking a bold step into the film industry by producing and starring in this animated retelling of the story of his musical career. The rest of the cast is extremely star-studded, with the likes of Gwen Stefani, Kendrick Lamar, Justin Timberlake and Jay-Z all voicing themselves. To say we're intrigued is an understatement.

APPLE STUDIOS, NETFLIX, SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES, UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Contributing editor **LEILA LATIF** has something to say...

So far, *Horizon: An American Saga* has clocked up approximately half-a-million frames of film

THIS MONTH...
ARE AUDIENCES REALLY LOSING THEIR ATTENTION SPANS?

By the time this issue hits shelves, I will have been to the heavenly Venice Film Festival, where there were some bum-numbing moments in store. Brady Corbet's *The Brutalist* clocks in at 215 minutes, Lav Diaz's *Phantosmia* is 250 minutes, and the second part of Kevin Costner's epic *Horizon: An American Saga* will bring the tale's total to a gargantuan 345 minutes. Reception for the first chapter of Costner's series wasn't quite as enthusiastic as was hoped, with star Michael Rooker blaming audiences. 'Everything's 90 minutes… Oh, come on, give me a break… Get over that shit. Let's watch a movie that actually tells a story, where you learn about the people and grow to like them or hate them. It's not all fast cut, cut, cut,' he scathingly said.

When questioned if audiences have lost their attention spans as they've become 'TikTok-ified,' Rooker replied, 'Totally,' adding, 'They gotta learn what it's like to watch real cinema.' As a person who could have happily sat through an additional two hours of *Killers of the Flower Moon* but also loves a TikTok scroll, I think it's entirely possible the two things can coexist, but some studies suggest that ingesting media in bite-sized pieces is affecting our attention spans and mental health. The long-term effects of watching TV shows cut into two-minute clips is still unclear, but there's something familiar about the pearl-clutching. Watching as many movies and TV shows as I did growing up, I was surrounded by warnings that it was rotting my brain. Then the panic moved on to video games, social media, *Minecraft* and TikTok. Social psychologist Dr Jonathan Haidt's recent book *The Anxious Generation* claims that since 2010 'adolescence and childhood got rewired', and the audience that made Costner's three-hour *Dances with Wolves* such a hit in 1990 is radically different from the one that he counted on to support *Horizon*.

Anyone who's tried to wrestle an iPad from their child knows that our early attachment to tech can be troubling, but I don't know that it's fair to suggest modern audiences can no longer handle lengthy films. Several successful films of recent years – *Avatar: The Way of Water*, *Oppenheimer*, *Avengers: Endgame* – were three hours long. Venice has been going since 1932. Its first-ever film was *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (96 minutes), but now many hit the three-hour mark, and per Einstein's theory of relativity, I believe the 'longest' screening I sat through was an 80-minute Harmony Korine film. To prove that point, I'd mention that *The Dark Knight* and *Batman v Superman* are both 152 minutes, but I don't think social media's rise made the latter feel significantly longer.

There are fascinating new filmmakers such as Luna Carmoon (*Hoard*) and Naqqash Khalid (*In Camera*) who are playing with form and talking about how cinema can adapt to new ways to grip neuro-atypical and 'TikTok-ified' people's attention, but their work is grounded in complex stories, great performances and stunning cinematography. In some senses, people are watching larger chunks of storytelling with binge-watching models – recently it seemed like the entire planet sat through six hours of *Supacell* in one sitting. Meanwhile, when Quibi launched, it was packed to the brim with starry talent making 10-minute episodes, but crashed and burned in under a year.

Spending time away from apps on our phones to touch grass is something I'm going to take Rooker's advice on and do, and I'm hoping *The Brutalist* earns every second of its 215 minutes. But fingers crossed that I'll catch a glimpse of Rooker on an Italian canal and be able to reassure him that the kids are probably alright.

LEILA WILL BE BACK NEXT ISSUE. FOR FURTHER MUSINGS AND MISSIVES FOLLOW @ LEILA_LATIF ON X/TWITTER.

THE L WORD

RICHARD FOREMAN/WARNER BROS.

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

Catherine's career has been built on exposing secrets – but she may have a few of her own

EXCLUSIVE

BY THE BOOK

DISCLAIMER Alfonso Cuarón teams up with Cate Blanchett for a series about dark pasts.

What would you do if you found a book telling the detailed story of your darkest secret? This is the gut-churning predicament faced by renowned documentarian Catherine (Cate Blanchett), the subject of a ruthless vendetta by Stephen (Kevin Kline), whose final mission in life is to avenge the death of his 19-year-old son Jonathan (Louis Partridge).

Adapted from the eponymous book by Renée Knight, *Disclaimer* is the first series to be entirely written, directed and produced by Oscar-winning filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón. 'I originally agreed to only write and direct the pilot. Then I kept on going and wrote the whole thing. Once I wrote the whole thing, I had to direct it,' the director tells *Teasers* ahead of the series' Venice Film Festival premiere.

Despite having created the 2014 fantasy series *Believe* and directing television episodes early in his career, Cuarón still believes he 'doesn't know how to do TV', and tackled *Disclaimer* as if it were a seven-hour-long feature. 'On TV, they tend to shoot many pages a day, but I shoot one or two. That meant my schedule was super-long. The most challenging thing was to manage my energy throughout, and the same for the actors, who had to commit to staying with the characters for such a long time.'

Cuarón had two key creative partners throughout the years it took to produce the series: leading actress and executive producer Blanchett, and his long-time collaborator Emmanuel Lubezki, the show's cinematographer alongside Bruno Delbonnel. 'The first element that came to my mind when I was writing was that Cate needed to play Catherine. She became a really important collaborator.'

'Once I wrote the whole thing, I had to direct it'
ALFONSO CUARÓN

The *Gravity* and *Children of Men* director returns to TV

It was Blanchett who suggested Kline play her onscreen nemesis. 'Kevin is a very fit man. My first thought was that he was too healthy to play Stephen, but when he had the costume on, his whole body language changed. It was incredible. Suddenly, I was in front of this decrepit old man.

'He had been under the radar, and it was so exciting to have him back into [playing] a real protagonist. He had a fake belly, a fake hunch, and had to play this character with a very specific British accent, knowing that accent is key within the structures of this class-based society.'

What originally attracted Cuarón to *Disclaimer* was the opportunity to play with different perspectives, using first-, second- and third-person voiceovers translated visually by two cinematographers. 'Ultimately, the most important voice is the one of the viewers and the stance they take based upon the information they are getting.'

RAFA SALES ROSS

DISCLAIMER PREMIERES ON APPLE TV+ ON 11 OCTOBER.

APPLE TV+

Aidan Turner (and his 'tache) stars as journalist Declan O'Hara, with David Tennant (below) as TV boss Lord Baddingham

EXCLUSIVE

KNIVES OUT

RIVALS An all-star cast lights up Jilly Cooper's 80s bonkbuster about backstabbing on the box.

When *Teasers* visits the set of *Rivals* in Bristol, there's no question who the real star is. While we may have just watched Aidan Turner and David Tennant (as gimlet-eyed TV journalist Declan O'Hara and his ambitious, unscrupulous boss Lord Tony Baddingham) sweep in to 1987's British Television Awards, and await appearances from Danny Dyer, Katherine Parkinson and Alex Hassell, a slight 86-year-old is inside, pretending to eat dinner.

'It was lovely,' Jilly Cooper tells us afterwards, enthusing about her cameo. 'They curled my hair beautifully!'

The queen of the bonkbuster couldn't be more thrilled with Disney+'s eight-part adaptation of her 1988 novel. 'They've cast gorgeous people of both sexes!' she beams. 'It does feel like a period piece to me, because it has lots of macho men who are allowed to be real men. As an executive producer, I can see how much trouble they're taking with it. They've looked after the plot, although occasionally they'll change things and I'll have a bit of a sulk. But when it appears on the screen, it's brilliant.'

Rivals certainly sets its stall out from the first shot, buttocks thrusting in a Concorde toilet and Robert Palmer's *Addicted to Love* grinding away on the soundtrack. The pace barely relents as the rakish Rupert Campbell-Black (Hassell) cuts a swathe through the society women of the Cotswolds and locks horns with Baddingham over the future of the latter's television company. Rupert's friend, novelist Lizzie Vereker (Katherine Parkinson), is also on hand to cut him down to size, while herself enjoying some extramarital excitement with Dyer's self-made millionaire. In short, plenty of sex, stilettos and a salon's worth of bubble perms and mullets. But also some salutary lessons.

'I hope it cheers everyone up,' agrees Cooper. 'But I also think it'll make people realise that integrity is important. There's not enough of it about these days.'

GABRIEL TATE

'While it is wickedly funny, we cover some very serious themes as well'
AIDAN TURNER

RIVALS IS COMING TO DISNEY+ THIS AUTUMN.

Q&A

Aidan Turner

Who is Declan O'Hara?
He's a journalist with a wife and a couple of kids. They've had to leave London for the Cotswolds, although we're not initially sure why, and it coincides with an offer he's received to leave the BBC and work for Tony Baddingham's TV company. He's a workaholic and impetuous – he generally thinks with his pen first, fists a very quick second.

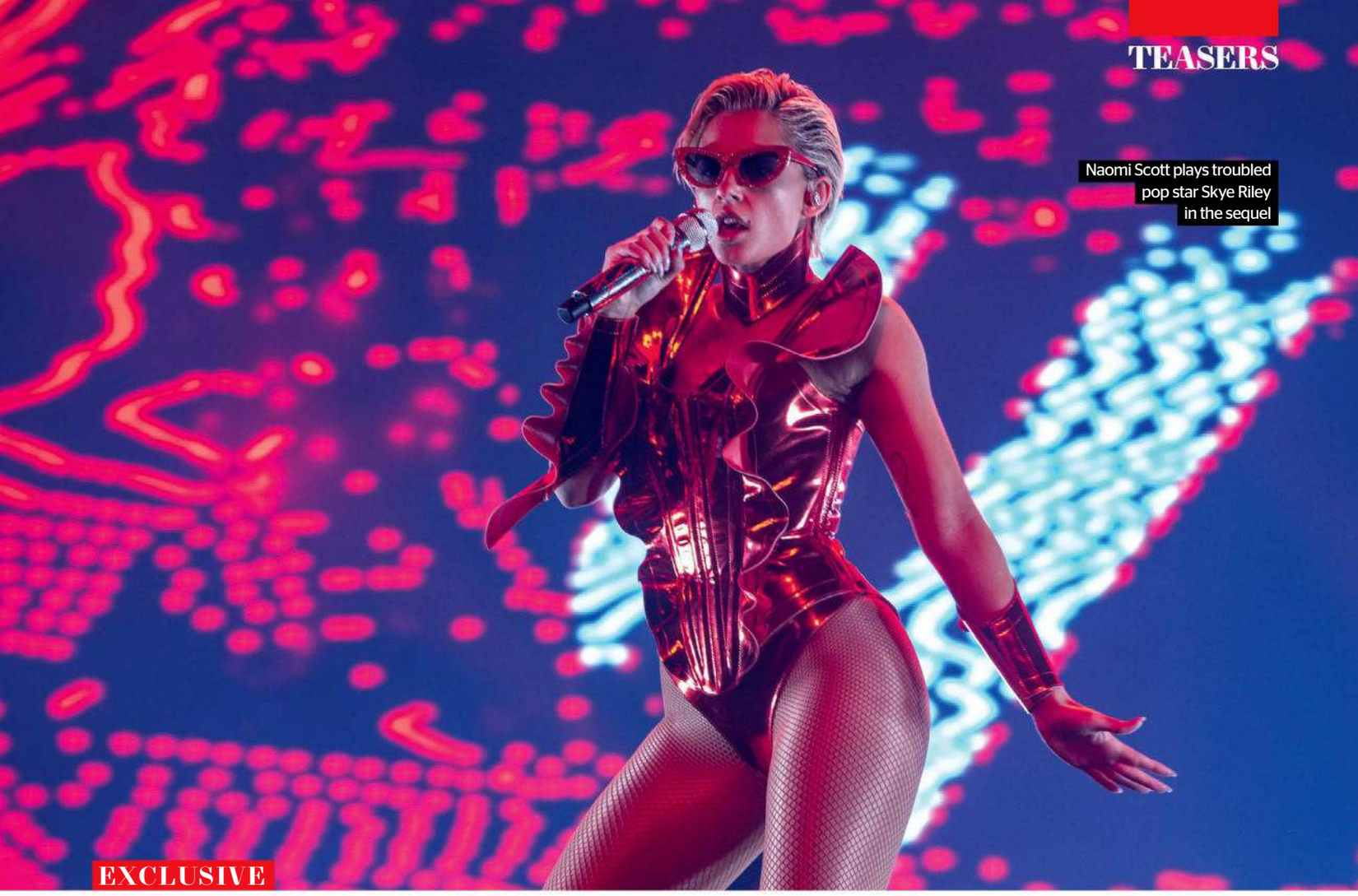
We have to talk about Declan's moustache...
It makes a real statement, doesn't it? You can hide behind a beard, whereas this Tom Selleck thing puts you front and centre. Weirdly, I looked very like my dad did back in the 1980s.

Why did *Rivals* appeal?
Jilly is brilliant at writing characters and, while it is wickedly funny, we cover some very serious themes as well, asking what sort of behaviour is acceptable today and what have we thrown in the bin.

Was filming as much fun as it looked?
It really was. There was one dinner-party scene where, the previous night, our entire cast had had a party. A lot of people were probably playing drunk for real that day – lots of sunglasses and dark shadows under eyes. Although I felt awful, witnessing other people's pain was hilarious...
GT

DISNEY+; GETTY; ROBERT VIGLASKY

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS



Naomi Scott plays troubled pop star Skye Riley in the sequel

EXCLUSIVE

GRIN AND BEAR IT

SMILE 2 Trauma-horror sequel sees the curse latch onto a pop superstar...

Parker Finn's debut horror feature *Smile* was originally destined for a streaming release. No one – not even the writer/director himself – expected that a late change to theatrical would create a hit horror sensation that made almost 13 times its budget at the box office. Given those figures, the swift greenlighting of a sequel came as less of a shock. But Finn didn't want to make a second movie just for the sake of it.

'I knew that if I was going to even think about approaching a sequel, I needed to find a way that I could fall back in love with a new main character and explore something interesting in the universe of Smile that felt thematically rich, and emotional and immediate again,' Finn explains, elaborating that he likes his stories to be character-driven.

The protagonist this time is Skye Riley, a pop superstar embarking on a world tour after some time away from the spotlight: 'What audiences will learn early on is that in Skye's recent past, she's disappeared from the spotlight for a while, and as we catch up with her at the beginning of the film she's returning to the public eye, but maybe carrying some baggage that we might discover.' In the first film we learn that the Smile curse is fuelled by trauma – Skye's own baggage makes her an easy victim.

Finding someone with the charisma of a superstar and the required vulnerability was no easy task, but *Aladdin*'s Naomi Scott proved to be a perfect fit – despite being best known as a live-action Disney princess. 'There's music, there's choreography, there's this very glitzy, glamorous element to the character. But the character also is going through something that's incredibly harrowing. So I needed somebody who was able to handle all of that with credibility, and Naomi just absolutely blew me away,' Finn explains of casting Scott, who'd never done a horror movie before. 'It was a blast to get to take a Disney princess and wrap her in the hug of [the] Smile [universe].'

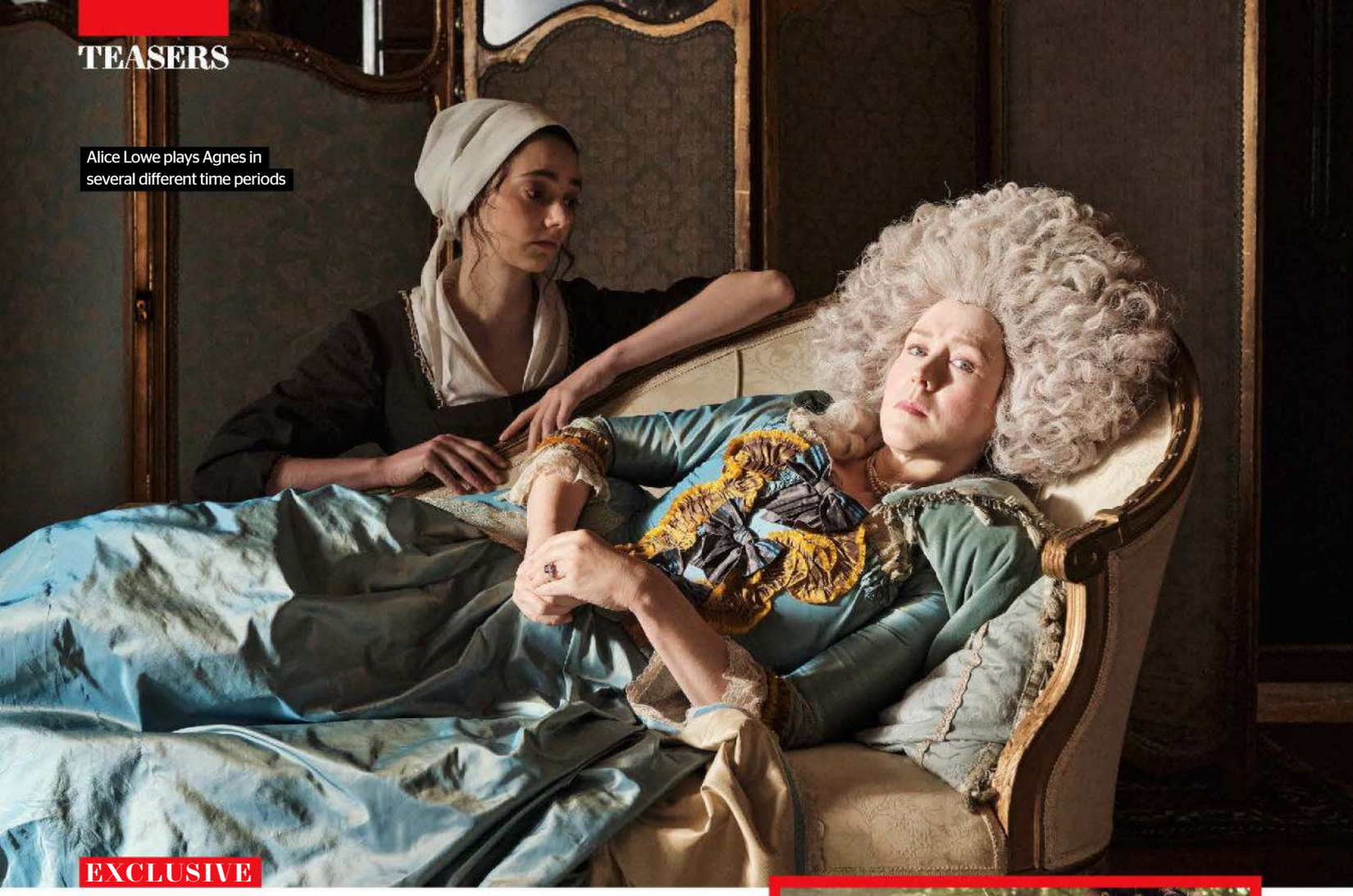
'The character is going through something harrowing'
PARKER FINN

Say cheese! Er, on second thoughts...

While by the end of the first movie we know a lot about how the curse works – and even what it looks like – the writer/director asserts that there's still a lot we don't know and that he's looking to surprise audiences with the direction this sequel takes. 'We had only sort of pulled back the corner of the rug to peek under,' Finn says of *Smile*. 'With the mystery of the first one, I thought it was really fun that, now that the audience is familiar, it allows this new context, this new way to position the audience. They come in ahead of where some of the characters are. I wanted to see, "Can we use that to the film's advantage?"' **LAUREN MILES**

SMILE 2 OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 18 OCTOBER.

PARAMOUNT PICTURES. BARBARA NITKE



Alice Lowe plays Agnes in several different time periods

EXCLUSIVE

BAD ROMANCE

TIMESTALKER Alice Lowe falls in love with the wrong man time and time again...

Following her directorial debut *Prevenge*, Alice Lowe wanted to do something not often afforded in the British film industry – be ambitious. 'We're so used to not having the budget that Hollywood has,' the *Sightseers* actor asserts over Zoom after arming herself with a much-needed cup of tea. 'It makes us under-ambitious about what we think we could achieve.'

Stars Aneurin Barnard and Alice Lowe

Her antidote to that? *Timestalker* – a dark not-quite-romcom set over the course of centuries. Her protagonist Agnes finds herself attracted to the same man, Alex (*Dunkirk*'s Aneurin Barnard), in every lifetime as she's reincarnated in the 1680s, 1790s, 1980s and the 22nd century. As romantic as that may sound, there's a bit of a catch: 'He's sort of a dickhead. On the surface he's appealing, but under, he's not.'

That's not to say that Agnes is entirely innocent either. The 'stalker' part of the film's title refers to her own obsessive behaviour. Lowe reveals that the idea for the movie began as a simple comedic concept: 'Wouldn't it be funny if someone stalked you over millennia? Like, you couldn't get away from your stalker, even in death?'

Having written the role of Agnes for herself, one of the obstacles the writer/director faced was the attitudes of financiers. 'They'd much rather it was Margot Robbie doing it,' Lowe explains. 'It's something really common to do in TV, to write a show for yourself, and then it's seen as being really weird in film,' she continues. 'Maybe it's just because Woody Allen did it, and now we don't like Woody Allen.' Then there's the matter of the movie not fitting neatly into one genre. 'Quite often funders will be like, "Well, it doesn't fit into the horror box quite, or it doesn't fit into the romcom box." It's a failure of imagination, basically.'

Timestalker's hybridity comes from the fact that it's, in Lowe's words, 'deconstructing the romcom'. It's no secret that many films of the genre have aged badly, with male leads behaving in often questionable ways. 'You can watch so many classic films and go, "Why is she chasing this absolute dick?"' Lowe says. In a way *Timestalker* acts as satire, calling those typical romcom tropes into question. 'It's really interesting to go, "Why are you chasing this guy?"' she says of Agnes and Alex's relationship – if indeed it can be called that.

'You can watch so many classic films and go, "Why is she chasing this absolute dick?"'
ALICE LOWE

Despite facing various hurdles in getting the movie made, Lowe has succeeded in pulling off her ambitious second feature, and the various attempts to make it tie in perfectly with its narrative themes. 'This film has lived and died several times. It's embedded into the project, that reincarnation idea, because it's been reincarnated many times.'

LAUREN MILES

TIMESTALKER OPENS IN CINEMAS THIS OCTOBER.

V.E.R TIDO RELEASING

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

NEXT BIG THING

BRANDON YOUNG

MAISY STELLA
IS NOW A MOVIE STAR TOO

Aged 20, Maisy Stella has already starred in hit ABC show *Nashville*, is a bestselling recording artist, authored a children's book, appeared on numerous 'best dressed' lists, and launched an exclusive furniture range. And now she's wowing critics as queer teen Elliott in ace comedy drama *My Old Ass*, in which she meets her older self in the form of Aubrey Plaza…

Why did you choose writer/director Megan Park's *My Old Ass* as your feature debut?
I was such a fan of Megan from *The Fallout*. And I felt so aligned with this movie. There were so many things about the character… It was very cosmic. Everything just came out as if it was me speaking.

Megan allowed you to mould the dialogue into your own words…
It makes the experience so specific. Megan's egoless. She's so fine being wrong or not knowing things about this generation. Megan was super-open to hearing about our experiences, especially with the queerness aspect of the movie.

You've achieved so much so young, but are strikingly grounded. How do you keep your own ego in check?
Who I am now has a lot to do with where I'm from and my family. My mum [country singer MaryLynne Stella] is one of nine kids. We lived on basically a commune in my childhood. All in the same house. I never washed it off. My sister [singer and actor Lennon Stella] as well… We keep each other in check.

Now that you've made a movie, do you have the bug for more?
Oh my God, I have the bug in a bad way! I can't sit still. I've filmed *Flowervale Street* by David Robert Mitchell, who I've been a fan of forever – *It Follows* is a favourite. I've just watched *Whiplash*. I was shaking; I drove to my mum's house and made her watch it. Damien Chazelle is the most genius. I also love Luca Guadagnino. I would cut off a limb to work with those two. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

MY OLD ASS OPENS IN UK CINEMAS ON 27 SEPTEMBER.

BETWEEN TAKES

JARED HARRIS ON 'HAUNTED' HOUSES AND THE DETAILED SETS OF *MAD MEN*...

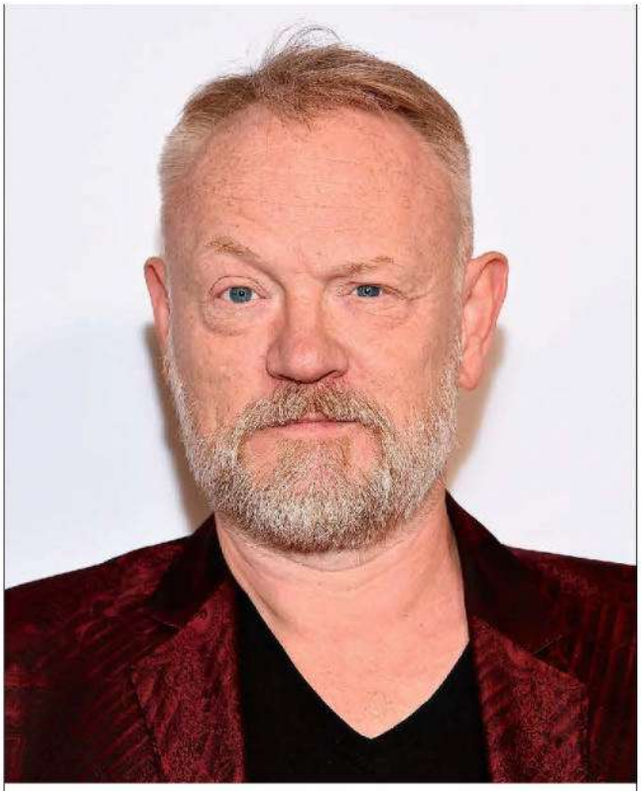
What do you usually take on set with you?
The sides – I transfer my notes from the scripts to the sides – and your coffee if you haven't finished it. Quite often, if the thing's well-organised, what happens is you start going through the works – hair, make-up, all that stuff – and then you're pulled and you go and rehearse, so a pencil's a good idea.

Do you have any on-set superstitions?
No. I think luck is real, definitely. But I don't believe in magic-eight balls or tea leaves or four-leaf clovers or stuff like that.

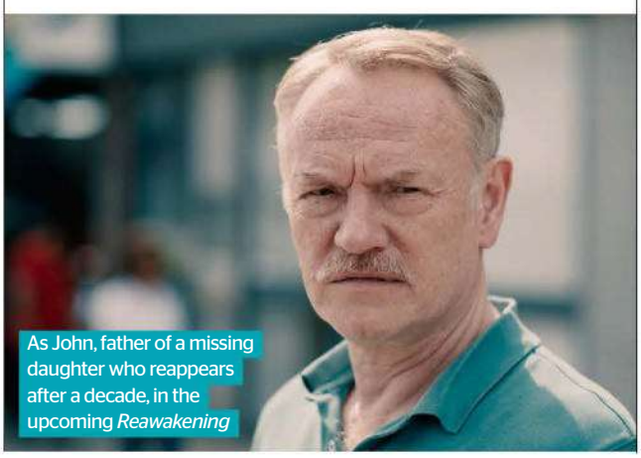
Do you go for a hot or cold lunch?
See, lunch is important. Good catering makes everybody look forward to lunch, so it's actually a really important piece of the alchemical puzzle. I've found that having a full stomach after lunch is disastrous for the rest of the day, particularly if you've got an important scene afterwards. Quite often they'll start a scene, and then at the most important part of it where they get into the meat of it and put the camera right in front of your face, they'll break for lunch and then come back and do that afterwards when you've lost the rhythm of the whole thing. On days like that, you don't have any lunch; you just sit and try to stay in an adjacent zone to where you need to be.

What's been the best on-set experience of your career?
The *Mad Men* set was great fun. First of all because the sets were so cool and the detail was just amazing. You'd open a drawer and there'd be nothing in those drawers that wasn't appropriate for that time period – and not just the decade, sometimes they knew what month that episode was taking place in. There were magazines in the lounge area that were out that month. It was like a time warp.

Have you ever stolen from a set?
I like to keep little trophies. I was allowed to take a pair of glasses that Lane Pryce had [in *Mad Men*] and I took some of the stuff on the desk. I generally try to keep something from everything that I've done.



> 'AFTER A WHILE IT WAS LIKE GOING INTO WORK AND STANDING THERE, LEGS WIDE, AND SOMEONE KICKING YOU IN THE NUTS'



As John, father of a missing daughter who reappears after a decade, in the upcoming *Reawakening*

When you're doing an accent for a role, do you keep it between takes?
It depends. If you're doing it a lot – so on *The Terror*, because I was there pretty much the whole time, then it's kind of a useful thing to do. I think it's difficult to do if you're sort of stepping in and out of it. It's something now that the younger generation of actors do very easily. They kind of learn from Daniel Day-Lewis and that approach to acting.

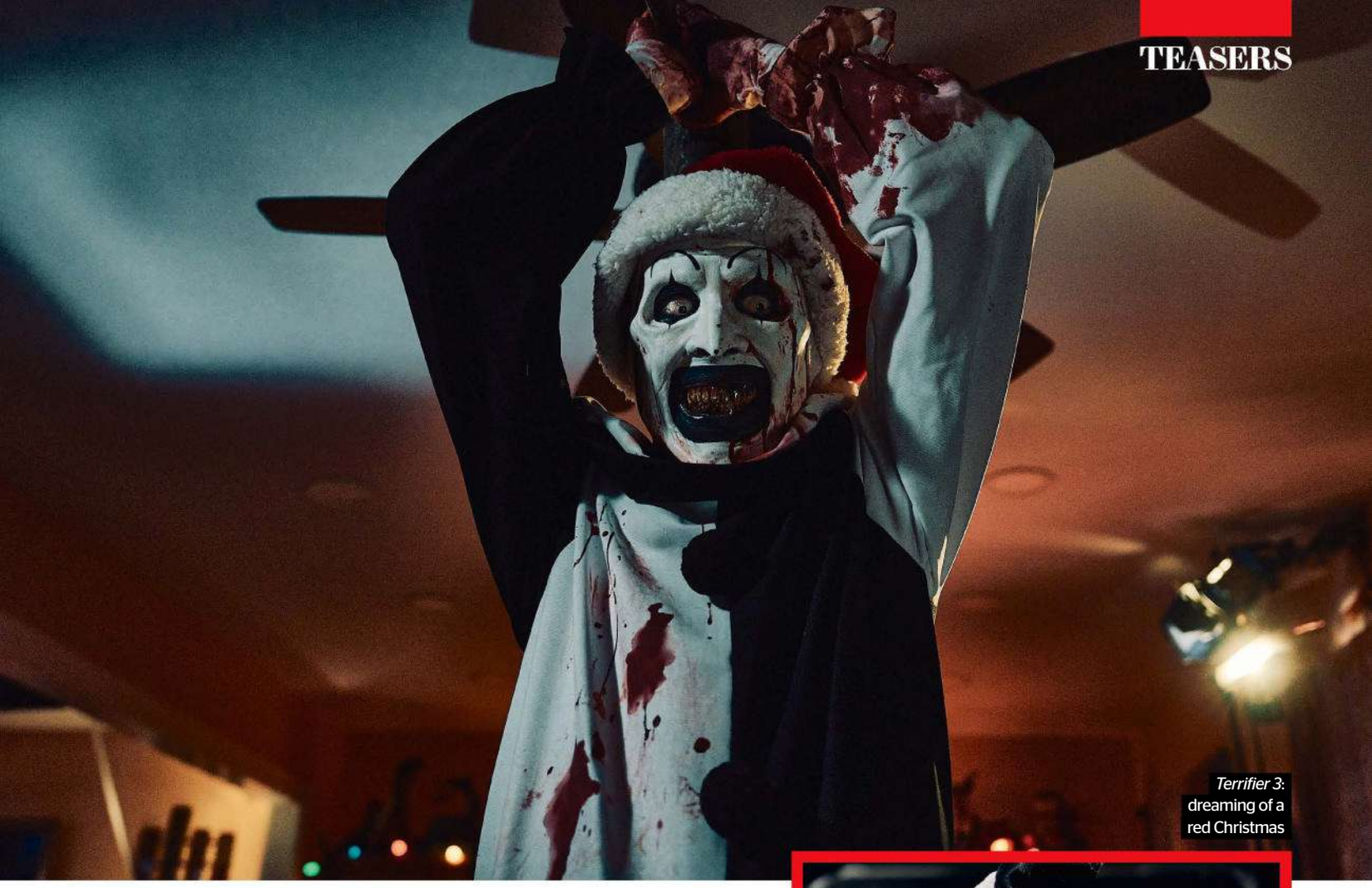
Was the Belter accent in *The Expanse* a difficult one to learn?
They had a linguist who invented the Belter language and then they had a dialect coach, and when I got there they said, 'We've got three levels of Belter dialect' – like a curry, you know, hot, medium and mild. And I said, 'Well I want the spiciest one.' I love that because it taught you a lot; there's a lot of attitude in that dialect. I learned a lot from getting my head around the dialect as to who [Anderson Dawes] was and how he wants to represent himself. I love that character.

How did the set of *Reawakening* compare to the average set?
That came together quite late for me, so I sort of dived straight into it. We discussed a little bit beforehand about where [the characters] came from and what their background was – there wasn't a hell of a lot of prep time for it. There was a house that we shot a lot of it in. That house, by the end of it, felt haunted to me. There were so many of these desperate scenes that we shot in that house that I couldn't wait to get out of it! After a while it was like going into work and standing there, legs wide, and someone kicking you right in the nuts and going, 'That's a great take. Let's go again!' **LAUREN MILES**

REAWAKENING OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 13 SEPTEMBER.

ALAMY, JADE FILMS

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS



Terrifier 3: dreaming of a red Christmas

5 THINGS

CLOWNING GORY

TERRIFIER 3 Creator Damien Leone says Art the Clown is coming home for Christmas...

David Howard Thornton reprises his role as Art

1 *TERRIFIER 3* IS A CHRISTMAS MOVIE

While *Terrifier* and *Terrifier 2* were set at Halloween, the third instalment will see Art the Clown deliver nasty surprises on Christmas Eve. 'I wanted to switch it up!' says writer/director Damien Leone, who's grown this franchise out of his 2011 short. 'Art can fit into any situation because he's such a fun, charming character! I've always wanted to do a maniac Santa Claus movie, but how do you do it differently? You put Art in the maniac Santa Claus situation!'

2 THIS ONE STARS JASON PATRIC

Not as Art – David Howard Thornton, an actor with experience in mime, returns to his signature role. But Patric is key… 'I was shown a picture of him dressed as Art the Clown on Halloween, handing out candy,' says Leone. 'I wound up going out to have dinner [with him]. He was like, "Hey, man, I'd love to work with you…" I won't say who he plays, but it's a crucial role to the Terrifier universe right now. It's something we set up in the sequel…'

3 STUDIOS WANTED TO CASH IN

'They were so curious as to what I did with so little money,' grins Leone, whose *Terrifier 2* made $15.7m off a $250,000 budget. 'They wanted to reboot it for a wider audience. That's not what I was interested in. They would say, "It's gotta be rated R, it can't be as gory as you made it…"

'I knew they'd never let me shoot the first 10 minutes of what I wanted to do [in *Terrifier 3*]. So I thought, "Let's just stay true to what this franchise is."'

4 IT'LL BE CRAZY GORY AGAIN...

'Oh, for sure,' laughs Leone. 'The expectations become, "How are you going to top that last big kill scene?" There's one in this film… Oh, boy.'

Believe it or not, Leone sets himself boundaries, despite his viciously violent movies causing cinemagoers to vomit in the aisles. 'I get asked if there are lines I won't cross, and I absolutely do think there are lines that I shouldn't cross. That's just for me, personally. I don't think that an artist should not show whatever they want – as long as it's fake, obviously.'

'Movies don't turn you into a serial killer. I would be a mass murderer!' DAMIEN LEONE

5 ...AND THAT'S OK

Think-pieces have pondered if the popularity of Art's brand of gleeful cruelty points to a sick society, a public bubbling with rage. 'There's merit to the idea that the crazier reality is…' says Leone. 'One of the reasons, I think, that *Terrifier 2* did so well was because it was in the midst of COVID. People were going stir-crazy and needed catharsis. But movies don't turn you into a serial killer. I would be a mass murderer!' JAMIE GRAHAM

TERRIFIER 3 OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 11 OCTOBER.

SIGNATURE ENTERTAINMENT. JESSE KORMAN

CONVENTION ROUND-UP

A MAGICAL SLATE

D23 *Teasers* brings you the biggest news from the Disney Entertainment Showcase...

LIVE-ACTION

The Dude himself, Jeff Bridges, made an appearance to introduce *Tron: Ares*, saying he never thought the franchise 'would have this legacy'. A new trailer reveals that Jared Leto's program, Ares, emerges from The Grid into the real world. Cue lightcycle car chases and a sneak peek at Bridges' character – seemingly a programme modelled on Grid creator Kevin Flynn. Interestingly, Nine Inch Nails is working on the score.

Jamie Lee Curtis and Lindsay Lohan revealed the official name of the *Freaky Friday* sequel – *Freakier Friday*. 'It feels like no time has passed,' Curtis said, elaborating that Lohan's character Anna is now a mother.

Speaking of sequels, James Cameron disclosed more about the third Avatar movie. Not technically live-action, but calling it animated feels inaccurate given the practical work that goes into Cameron's franchise. 'The characters are so alive and it feels so real. It's also got very high emotional stakes – more than ever before,' the director promised before the movie's official title – *Avatar: Fire and Ash* – was announced.

A more left-field announcement at the presentation came from Dwayne Johnson in the form of *Monster Jam*, a movie about monster-truck drivers that the actor called an 'immersive and cool' experience.

The first trailer and footage from Disney's *Snow White* live-action remake was also screened, showing Rachel Zegler in costume singing *Whistle While You Work* with CGI dwarves and various forest animals. So far it looks very faithful to the original 1937 animated movie.

THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY

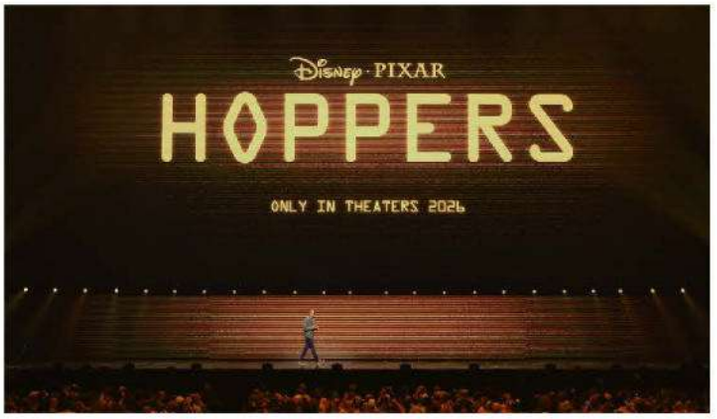
SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

ANIMATION

Walt Disney Animation Studios drummed up a lot of excitement for its upcoming sequels, from *Zootopia 2* to *Frozen 3*... and *4*. 'Coming out of *Frozen 2* we had a lot of questions. It will take two films to answer them,' announced chief creative officer Jennifer Lee, confirming that a fourth movie is also in the works.

The voice of Officer Judy Hopps, Ginnifer Goodwin, took to the stage to tease *Zootopia 2*, saying that reptiles will be prominent characters. She also introduced a 'slippery, highly venomous character' named Gary, voiced by Ke Huy Quan. Teaser footage showed fox and bunny duo Nick (Jason Bateman) and Judy tracking down Quan's wanted reptile, encountering some very unhelpful characters in the process.

Dwayne Johnson and Auli'i Cravalho came out to chat about *Moana 2*, with more plot details of the sequel revealed. Moana is the leader of her tribe, and has a little sister. A magical storm that hits her island leads Moana on her next adventure, as she has to break a curse that's been placed on her home.



PIXAR

Pixar had a lot of announcements to make, and CCO Pete Docter wasted no time in rattling them off. A new original movie called *Hoppers* has been set for 2026, with a trailer revealing that protagonist Mabel gets her consciousness transferred into a robotic beaver to experience life as an animal. *The Incredibles 3* has also been officially announced, with Brad Bird developing the project.

More details were revealed about *Toy Story 5*. The sequel (five-quel?) will see the toys 'come face to face with what every kid is obsessed with today – electronics,' Docter explained. Andrew Stanton – who's worked on every Toy Story movie so far – is set to direct.

The studio is also releasing their first ever long-form series, *Win or Lose*, in December this year on Disney+. Docter described it as 'completely unique and bold'.

STAR WARS

The stars of the Star Wars universe took to the stage to talk about upcoming Disney+ shows – and the franchise's first theatrical release since 2019. *The Mandalorian & Grogu* is due in cinemas in the summer of 2026, and will see the pair take on bounty-hunting jobs. 'I'll be more selective with my assignments,' Din Djarin says in the first trailer – although he's seen blasting people to bits soon after. Fans of the animated shows will be pleased to see that Zeb from *Star Wars: Rebels* will also appear in the film. Director Jon Favreau shared that they've 'just started filming'.

Coming much sooner are *Andor* Season 2 and *Skeleton Crew*. Jude Law plays a Force user in the latter, which he says is inspired by 'Amblin coming-of-age films'. A trailer for the series – on Disney+ in December – shows a group of kids looking for adventure.

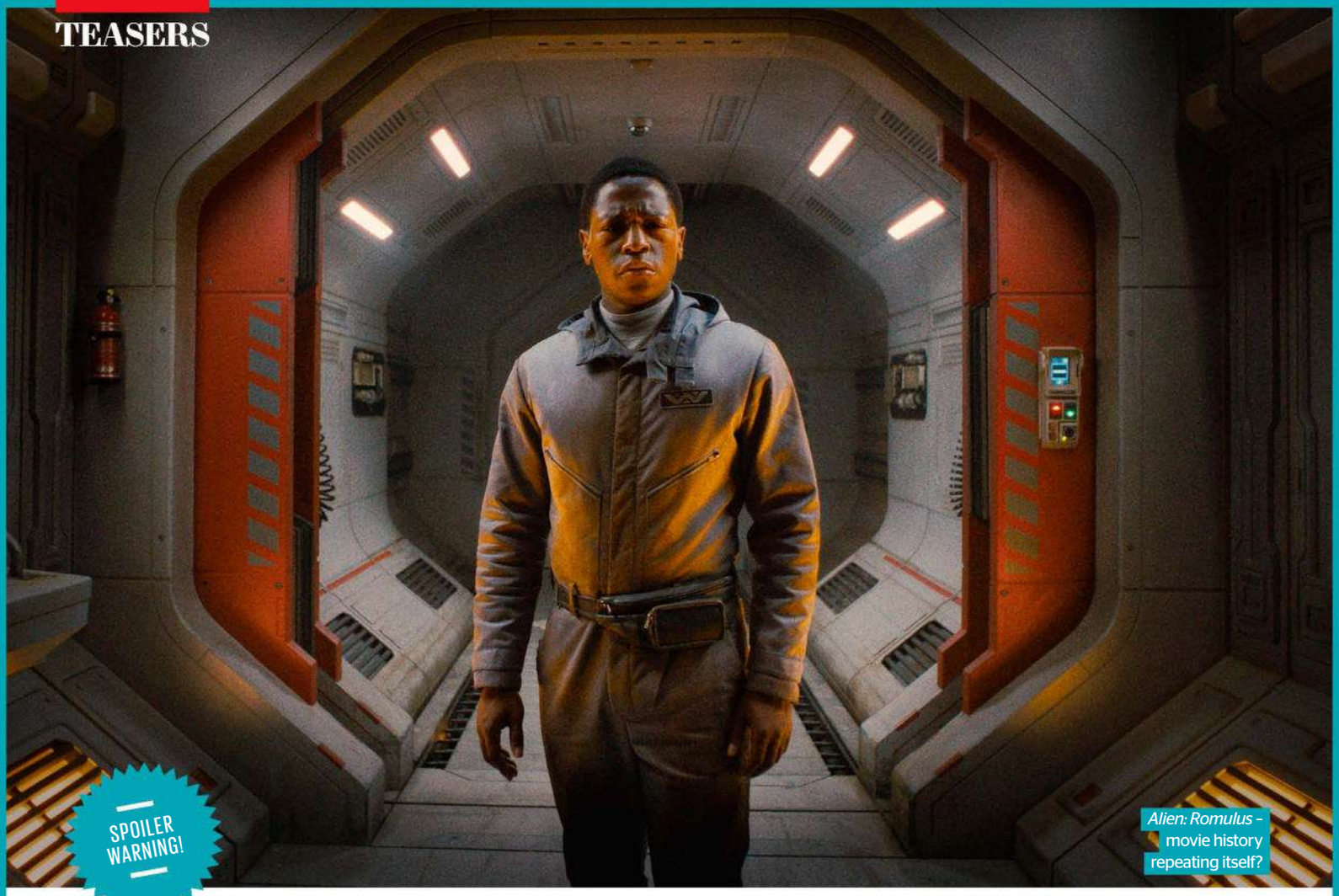
Diego Luna revealed that Season 2 of *Andor* will take place over four years, leading up to the events of 2016's *Rogue One*. 'Every slice of time charts Cassian's growth into a rebel leader,' he said. A behind-the-scenes look shows that *Rogue One* characters will be returning, including Ben Mendelsohn's Krennic and Alan Tudyk's droid K-2SO.

MARVEL

Despite the myriad announcements made at Comic-Con, Marvel Studios had yet more to reveal. The cast of *Daredevil: Born Again* made an appearance, with Charlie Cox, Jon Bernthal, Elden Henson and Deborah Ann Woll all present. The first trailer for the show included Vincent D'Onofrio's Wilson Fisk smashing things with his bare hands and Cox's Matt Murdock threatening him. When asked what kind of lawyer he is, Murdock responds, 'A really good one.'

A teaser for series *Ironheart* shows Dominique Thorne's protagonist going to great (and illegal) lengths to create her own Iron Man-style suit, and a video made by the cast of *The Fantastic Four: First Steps* showed Joseph Quinn in a retro-looking white-and-blue costume. It's also been revealed that Michael Giacchino will be composing the score.

LAUREN MILES



SPOILER WARNING!

Alien: Romulus – movie history repeating itself?

CAN WE TALK ABOUT?

FAN SERVICE GETTING OUT OF CONTROL

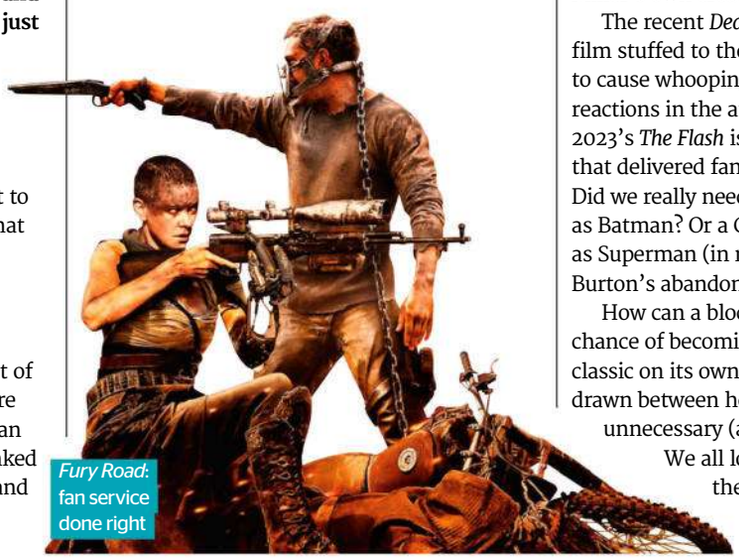
MARTYN CONTERIO

'Get away from her, you bitch.' Great line. Actually, it's iconic. But when it's uttered towards the end of *Alien: Romulus*, you won't believe your ears. Same goes for the other memorable bits cribbed directly from Ridley Scott's *Alien* and James Cameron's *Aliens*. Because it's not just dialogue: there are shots replicated, moments revisited from the series (and video game *Alien: Isolation*) and one familiar actor from the franchise is brought back from the dead with VFX.

In such instances, does fan service start to feel like a snake eating its own tail? Say what you like about the various merits (or lack thereof) of anything after *Aliens*, but each film had a distinct identity. *Alien* movies should aspire to be more than fan fiction.

Audiences have always gotten a kick out of movies referencing other movies (they were doing it as far back as the silent era). But fan service is a relatively new phenomenon linked to properties such as the MCU, the DCEU and *Star Wars*. A savvy, geek-literate audience now demands Easter eggs and callbacks in every film, every show, and acts vocally disappointed when those treats fail to materialise to their satisfaction.

> 'A SAVVY, GEEK-LITERATE AUDIENCE NOW DEMANDS CALLBACKS IN EVERY FILM, EVERY SHOW'



Fury Road: fan service done right

Still, fan service can be creative. George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* provided a laundry list of nods to the original *Mad Max* trilogy: it just didn't shout about it. And the nostalgia factor worked too – primarily because it was Miller's own creation, not somebody else's.

The recent *Deadpool & Wolverine* is another film stuffed to the gills with scenes designed to cause whooping, hollering, and 'amagawd' reactions in the auditorium. Meanwhile, 2023's *The Flash* is a comic-book spectacle that delivered fan service up the wazoo. Did we really need Michael Keaton returning as Batman? Or a CGI Nicolas Cage as Superman (in reference to Tim Burton's abandoned 1990s project)?

How can a blockbuster film stand any chance of becoming a potentially beloved classic on its own terms? A line must be drawn between heartfelt homage and unnecessary (and lazy) nostalgia.

We all love these characters, these franchises, but it's how they're served creatively that matters the most.

ALAMY

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

Layla is an uplifting antidote to what the director calls 'dour queer drama'

EXCLUSIVE

SELF EXPRESSION

LAYLA A non-binary, British-Palestinian drag queen navigates their expression of identity.

I was very frustrated with the lack of roles I was auditioning for as an Arab, queer actor,' Amrou Al-Kadhi says of their start in the industry. The British-Palestinian trans artist instead started writing and directing characters for queer Arabs to inhabit – as in *Layla*, the joyous story of a trans creative. 'I realised I felt most free, liberated and happy when I was creating universes, stories and roles I wish could have existed when I started out.'

Rising star Bilal Hasna delivers a show-stopping turn as Layla, who we first meet in drag and on their way to a performance. Layla initially seems comfortable with their queer, trans identity, but all that changes when they fall in love with Max (Louis Greatorex). We see Layla acting differently whether they are with Max, their friendship group and their conservative parents as they struggle, notes Al-Kadhi, to 'negotiate which bit of themselves to show different people in their lives'.

Al-Kadhi says their 'semi-autobiographical' film was a deliberate subversion of queer, trans narratives where 'people usually find themselves through drag'. They continue: '*Layla* is about that queer survival mechanism of code-switching and shapeshifting. It's not about finding yourself, but how ultimately you just have to give up on people-pleasing.' Al-Kadhi says they were 'very like Layla' in their youth. 'In a way, this film was me letting go of that side of myself.'

Much of the movie is also a fantasy of what Al-Kadhi was yearning for growing up, including a 'utopic household' where Layla and their 'queer people of colour' friendship group can afford to live together.

'I hope audiences feel hopeful and inspired'
AMROU AL-KADHI

Bilal Hasna takes on the titular role

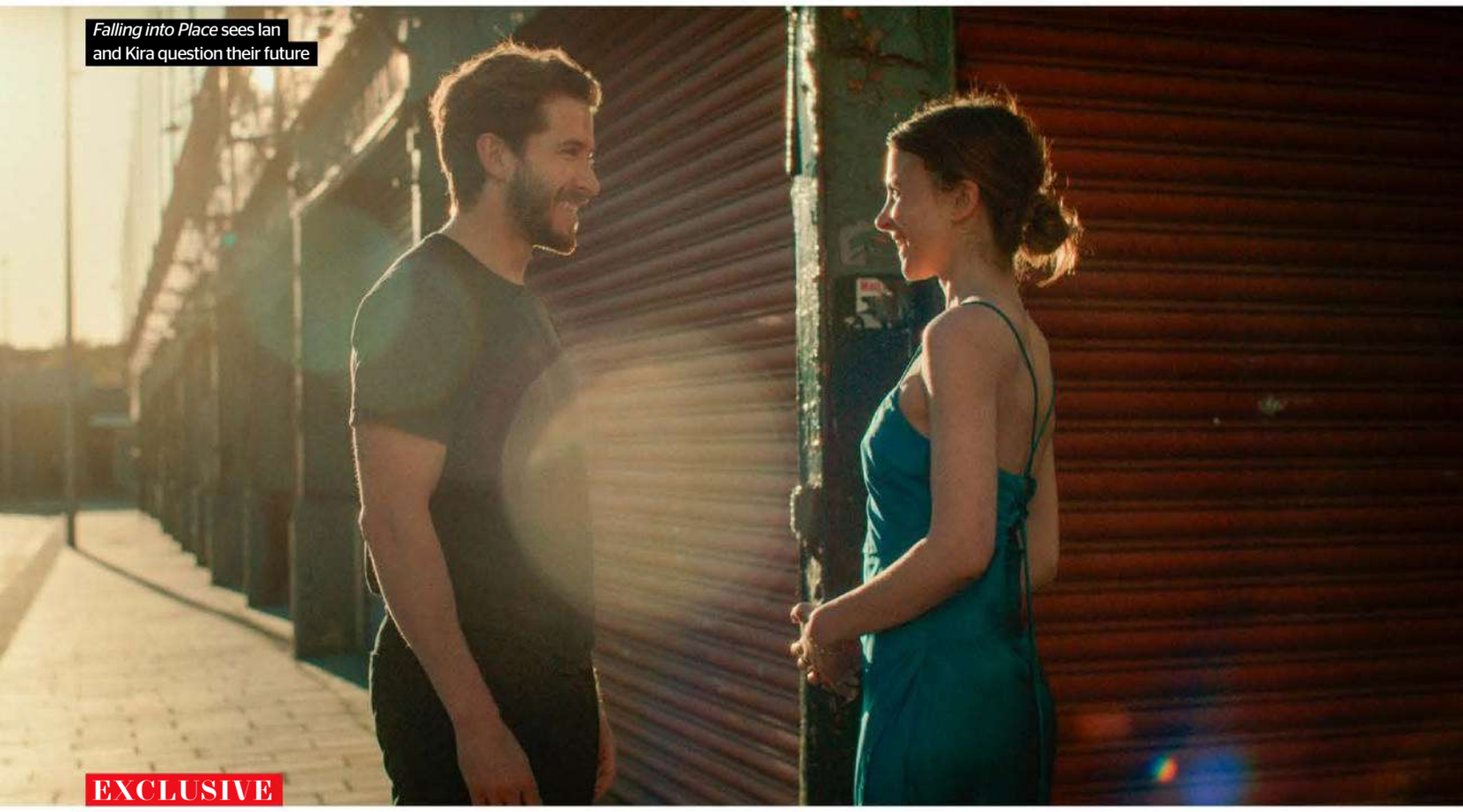
'I quite like the idea of taking my experiences and dreams and creating a different possibility on screen,' the writer/director continues. 'Seeing a more positive world that I definitely didn't have when I was younger was really liberating... *Layla* was cathartic because you're taking sadness, trauma, experiences and issues with your upbringing, and changing them.'

The film's story is ultimately one of joy. Al-Kadhi says they didn't want *Layla* to be like much of the 'dour queer drama or trauma porn stuff' that has traditionally inhabited this filmmaking space. Instead, vibrant films like *Body Electric*, *Girlhood* and *Keep the Lights On* were inspirations.

'Drag is just this joyous media that's born out of feeling like an outsider. I think there is something particularly now, with the state of the world, where joy is a very radical activity,' they explain. 'I hope audiences feel hopeful and inspired by the magic of Layla's queerness. I hope it gives them something to dream about, to hope towards.' **ELIZABETH AUBREY**

LAYLA OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 25 OCTOBER.

COURTESY OF CURZON



Falling into Place sees Ian and Kira question their future

EXCLUSIVE

THE SKYE'S THE LIMIT

FALLING INTO PLACE Aylin Tezel stars in and directs her own contemporary romantic drama.

Rewind to New Year's Day, 2018. Visiting friends in Edinburgh to celebrate Hogmanay, the German actor Aylin Tezel, sitting alone in a cafe, resolves to start writing her first screenplay – *Falling into Place*. 'I began with two characters in their 30s, Ian and Kira, and I had a question which came hand in hand with a strong emotion,' she recalls. 'When they started speaking, they asked each other, "Why are we here?" in the sense of, "What's the point of being alive?" I had a longing to find out the answer during the process of writing. I didn't have a whole story in my head that I wrote down. Instead, I tried to let the story emerge through the characters.'

Tezel's completed script turned out to be the catalyst for an international co-production. The film was made in English, with the writer/director herself playing the lead role of stage designer Kira, opposite the Glaswegian actor Chris Fulton (*Bridgerton*) as struggling musician Ian. The crew was mainly Scottish while, financed by German producers, its shoot involved locations on the Isle of Skye, Glasgow (standing in for London interiors), Hackney and North Rhine-Westphalia.

Her editor David J. Achilles has described the film as 'a love story in which the two main characters are not in the same place', yet Tezel herself considers *Falling into Place* as 'two different stories of self-love. These characters are pushed onto a path because they meet, but they have to go on their own journeys and develop the ability to love themselves in a new way… What interested me was exploring why it is so hard to love ourselves.'

'What interested me was exploring why it is so hard to love ourselves'
AYLIN TEZEL

Chris Fulton co-stars as love interest Ian

Tezel acknowledges the challenges of combining directing and acting in her own movie, revealing that during the month-long filming period she was getting by on four or five hours of sleep a night. For the scenes involving her character Kira, she allowed herself no more than a couple of takes. 'I was lucky that Kira doesn't have to look that great for most of the running time,' she smiles, 'because she is struggling emotionally.'

There were also the mercurial weather conditions during principal photography on the Isle of Skye, which presented issues of continuity for the production team. 'There was one scene where Ian rushes out of his parents' house in an emergency to start the car,' she remembers. 'I'd written it for it to be lashing down with rain, but the producers told me that we couldn't afford rain machines, so I was feeling a bit disappointed. Then on the day of shooting, out of nowhere it started snowing, which made it so dramatic. That's just one of the many gifts Skye gave to us.' **TOM DAWSON**

FALLING INTO PLACE OPENS IN CINEMAS LATER THIS AUTUMN.

COMPACT PICTURES

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

THE HERO

LUPITA NYONG'O
ON ACTING, DIRECTING AND DEALING WITH VOCAL INJURIES.

Very few people win an Oscar for their first feature-film performance. Lupita Nyong'o happens to be among the privileged few, winning Best Supporting Actress for her role in *12 Years a Slave*. Since then her career has been full of interesting characters, from a dual role in Jordan Peele's *Us* to a certain Wild Robot in DreamWorks' latest animated adventure…

In 2009 you made a documentary, *In My Genes*. Would you ever go back to writing and directing?
I really love documentary, and I would want to do that again. I'm not particularly interested in directing fiction, to be honest.

Why's that?
Because I feel like you have to be interested in playing god. Directors have to be mini gods. They have to care about every single element in front of the camera, like the colour of the lampshade and this blade of grass, and what angle it sits at, and I don't have that patience!

How did it feel to have *12 Years a Slave* be so successful and to win an Oscar?
It's very hard to sum up how it felt. It was surprising; it was beautiful; it was scary; it was exhilarating; it was everything. It's completely, singularly, the most life-altering experience of my life. It's impossible to think of my career without that first film.

You've joined a few franchises now, including Star Wars and Marvel. Is it intimidating to join a beloved franchise?
I think acting is intimidating. Period. At least for me, I know that every role begins with a feeling of intimidation. When you're stepping into beloved shoes then yes, there's that extra pressure, but at the end of the day you can't pay attention to that because you've got your job to do. You just have to focus on the job at hand and let the editors and producers worry about the legacy.

What was it like working with Jordan Peele on *Us*?
It was amazing to work with Jordan Peele! I feel so blessed to have been a big part of his sophomore film. He has a very specific vision. He's an incredible communicator; he really knows how to inspire the group effort. And he really offered me an incredible challenge, to play these two characters [Adelaide and Red] and trusting me with that and inviting me into his creative process very, very early on. We really built that movie and those characters together – it was in very close consultation with him.

The voice you did for Red is distinctive. Was it strenuous?
It was a strenuous voice, but I did it very responsibly. I worked with a vocal coach and an accent coach, and so I was hell-bent on doing it and not injuring myself. What is ironic is that I didn't injure myself doing Red, but I did injure myself doing *The Wild Robot*…

How's that?
Well, at the start of the movie Roz has a very high and bright resonance, and my voice is a lot more sultry and low. I just had one too many sessions and one too many takes of it, and injured my voice. I got these vocal polyps on my throat that I needed to get surgery for. But I didn't want to get surgery, so I opted to remain silent for three months, and I healed myself.

What about Roz as a character drew you to *The Wild Robot*?
I liked her naivete. She's this very sophisticated and capable robot, but in this particular context she's as good as a brand-new baby. She has to go about learning how to survive on this island, how to be wild in a way that is so endearing. It's nice to see a character like that – an adult character, if you will – take on the world with such fresh and innocent eyes, and she's able to achieve her goals without losing that newness and innocence.

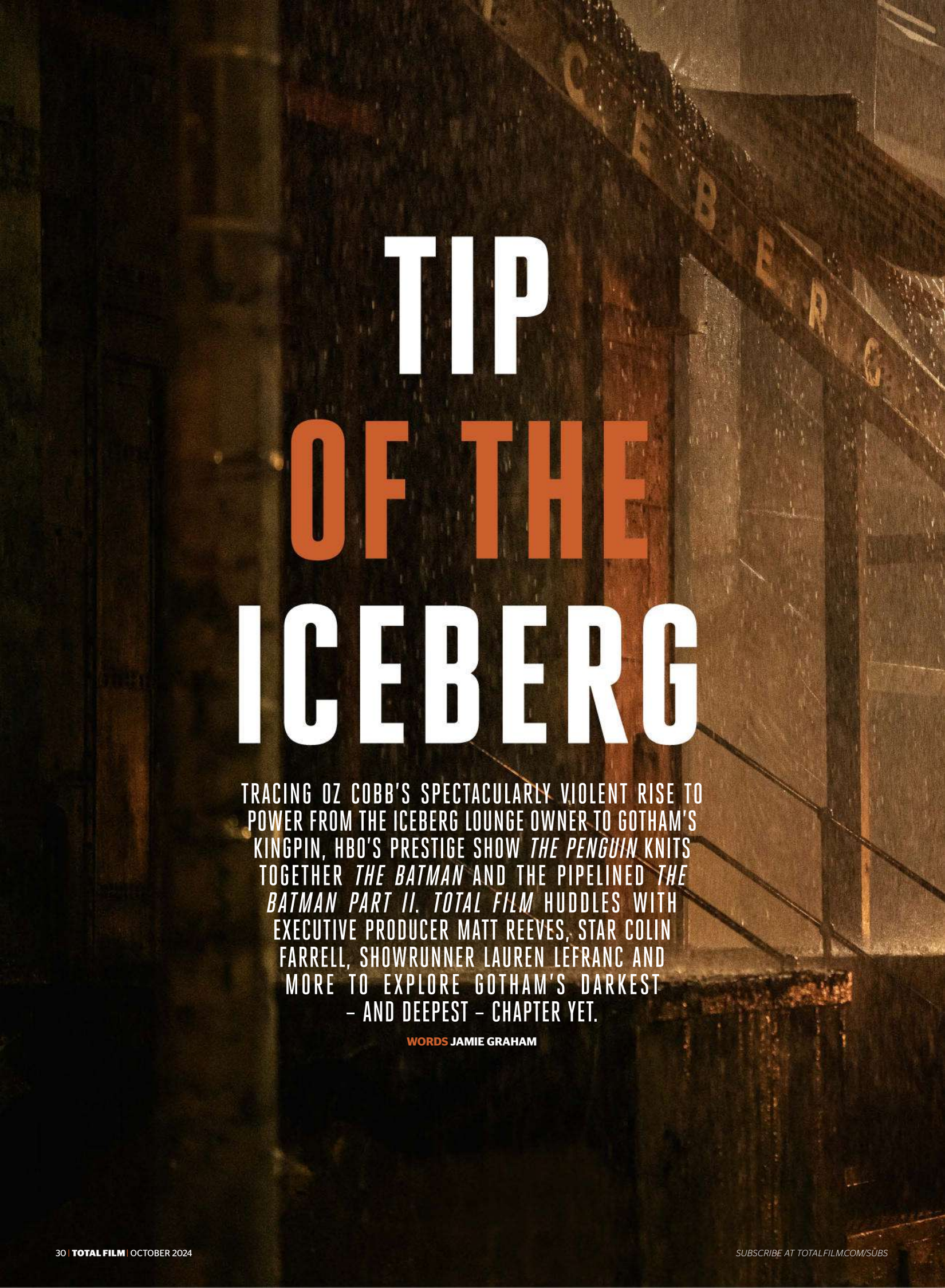
LAUREN MILES

From top: Nyong'o in *12 Years a Slave* (2013), *Us* (2019) and *The Wild Robot*

'JORDAN PEELE HAS A VERY SPECIFIC VISION. HE'S AN INCREDIBLE COMMUNICATOR'

THE WILD ROBOT OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 18 OCTOBER.

ALAMY, GETTY, UNIVERSAL PICTURES



TIP OF THE ICEBERG

TRACING OZ COBB'S SPECTACULARLY VIOLENT RISE TO POWER FROM THE ICEBERG LOUNGE OWNER TO GOTHAM'S KINGPIN, HBO'S PRESTIGE SHOW *THE PENGUIN* KNITS TOGETHER *THE BATMAN* AND THE PIPELINED *THE BATMAN PART II*. *TOTAL FILM* HUDDLES WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER MATT REEVES, STAR COLIN FARRELL, SHOWRUNNER LAUREN LEFRANC AND MORE TO EXPLORE GOTHAM'S DARKEST – AND DEEPEST – CHAPTER YET.

WORDS JAMIE GRAHAM

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

At the end of Matt Reeves' 2022 epic *The Batman*, as Paul Dano's Riddler resides in Arkham State Hospital, Gotham sits underwater and John Turturro's crime lord Carmine Falcone lies in the morgue, Zoë Kravitz's Selina Kyle turns to Robert Pattinson's Batman and says, 'There's gonna be a power grab. It'll be bloody.'

She's not wrong, though just *how* bloody – and dark, and twisted, and just plain wrong in the head – not even she could have predicted, nor how complex. By the time *The Batman Part II* swoops into cinemas in October 2026, it'll all be sorted, the power vacuum plugged ready for attention to swing back to Batman and whatever new villain(s) he has to contend with. But if you want to know just how it gets plugged (and trust us, you do), then eight-part HBO show *The Penguin* is your ringside seat.

Starting a week after the cataclysmic conclusion of *The Batman* and ending a week before *The Batman Part II* gets under way, *The Penguin* tracks Colin Farrell's Oswald Cobb as he embarks on a *Scarface*-like rise to become kingpin. In *The Batman*, Cobb, lieutenant of Carmine Falcone and manager of The Iceberg Lounge in which cops and politicos hang out with underworld figures, is only in a few scenes, but, boy, did he make an impression.

'I felt like I was getting short shrift only having seven scenes,' grins Farrell on Zoom, his face looming out of darkness so dramatic it's tempting to think that *The Batman* DoP Greig Fraser has lit his digs in Macau, where he's currently filming Edward Berger's *The Ballad of a Small Player*. Farrell explains that he felt like an animator bringing a 'gorgeous creation' to life, and that said creation – Oz Cobb, as designed by prosthetics and make-up genius Mike Marino (see boxout on p36) – deserved more. 'The first make-up test was about five months before *The Batman*. It was one of the best days. I've had some really lovely, cool, fun, interesting, out-there days as an actor over 25 years – working with undercover cops doing fucking this, that and the other, the jungles of fucking Thailand, the deserts of Northern Africa – and I swear to God, I've never had as magic a day as I had with eight artists in an empty soundstage on Warner Bros.' lot from fucking 12 o'clock in the afternoon to eight o'clock at night.'

The Penguin follows the gangster as he attempts to thrive in a post-Falcone Gotham

Sofia Falcone (Cristin Milioti) is out of Arkham – and has designs on power

But Marino's flawless design wasn't the only reason Oz deserved more. There was the fact the Penguin has been a marquee DC villain since his first appearance in *Detective Comics* #58 (December 1941), and that Farrell played him with such dark humour and panache. And on another level, Oz deserves more in that, as a character, he's not content with his lot in life. A 'gimp in an empty suit' is how Falcone describes him, to his face, towards the end of *The Batman*. Cobb understandably has a cob on, knowing he's capable of so much more.

Fortunately, both the director and the producer of *The Batman* already had plans to focus on Oz's ascent to the great and powerful. 'Colin came to me on set and said,

HBO/MACALL POLAY

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

HBO Max (now Max), and the idea of doing deep dives on marquee characters, starting with Oswald Cobb, was thrilling to all. 'In long-form, you can go into the minutiae of a character's life,' says Reeves.

So sensible, and enticing, was the plan that it didn't so much as wobble when James Gunn and Peter Safran were handed the reigns of DC Studios in October 2022. *The Batman*, of course, was not a part of the DCU and falls under the DC Elseworlds banner, which allows for stories to take place without affecting the larger DC universe. Specifically, *The Batman* and *The Penguin* are the first two pieces in what is being called the Batman Epic Crime Saga.

'The only conversations that Matt and I had with James and Peter were that they loved the movie, they loved that we'd already been in production with *The Penguin*, and they were all-in on what we were doing,' says Clark. 'I've known these guys for a very long time and they know quality filmmakers, so they looked at Matt as a real opportunity. We're all working for DC. We happen to be operating in a timeline that doesn't sync up with what they need to do with their DCU movies, but we're still a DC character and a DC world, so we're all in the same family.'

As Reeves was editing *The Batman* with William Hoy and Tyler Nelson, producer Lauren LeFranc (*Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, *Impulse*) was invited to watch the first 40 minutes of the movie and to read the script. She was then encouraged to pick up *The Penguin* and run with it, fashioning a proper character study that tracks Oz Cobb's rise to the top of Gotham's underworld. 'In the vein of *Scarface*,' was the brief.

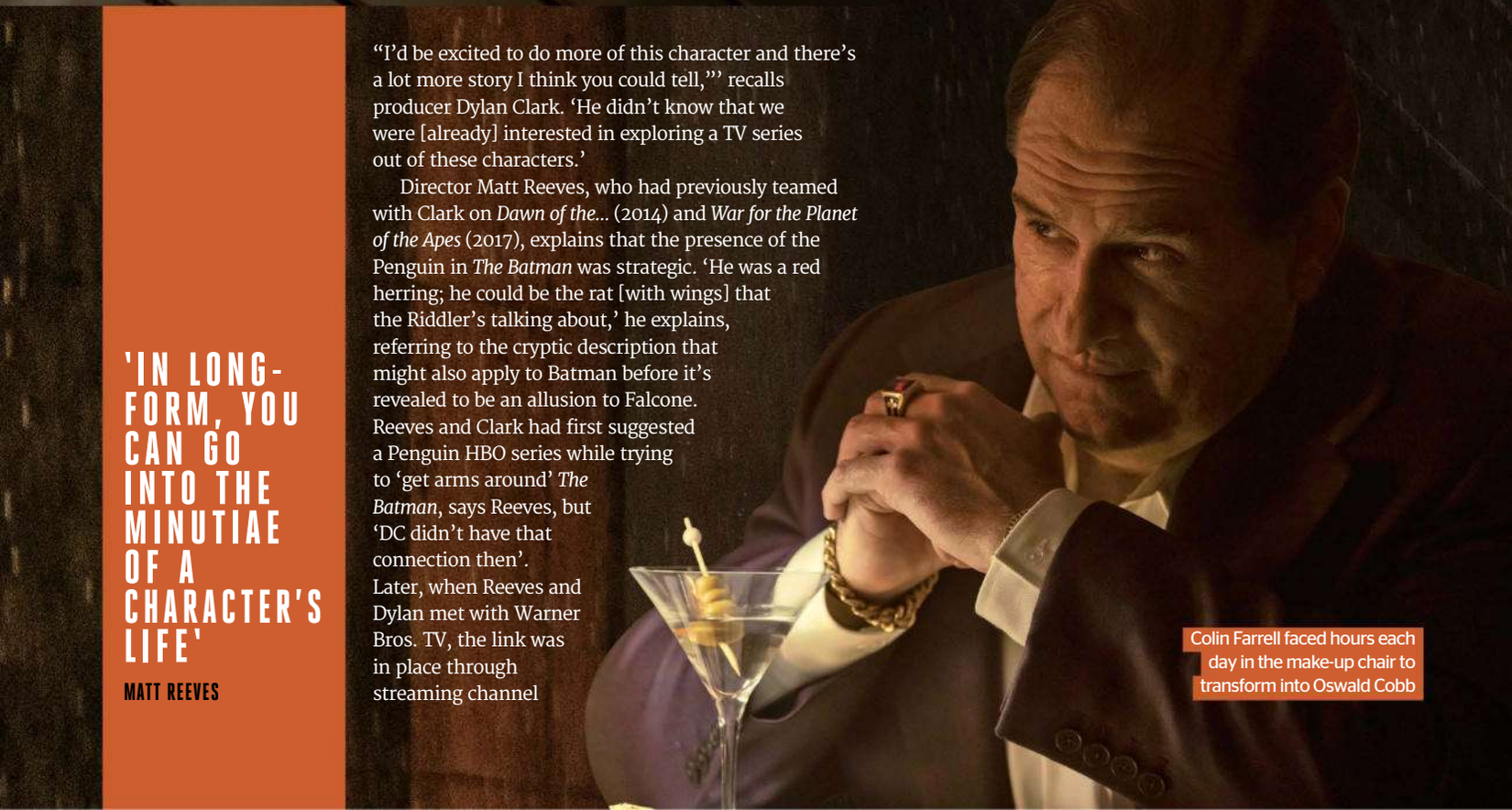
'I thought, "What does that mean?"' she smiles. 'It's so vague. I started to think about Oz and what he really wants, and what his version of power is. And that's where I started to think about his mother and bringing her in as a character, and I started thinking about Buddy Cianci, the mayor of Providence, Rhode Island for 21 years, who worked with the Mob in New England. He was a very charming, affable guy, but also extremely violent. He was put in jail a couple

"I'd be excited to do more of this character and there's a lot more story I think you could tell,"' recalls producer Dylan Clark. 'He didn't know that we were [already] interested in exploring a TV series out of these characters.'

Director Matt Reeves, who had previously teamed with Clark on *Dawn of the...* (2014) and *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017), explains that the presence of the Penguin in *The Batman* was strategic. 'He was a red herring; he could be the rat [with wings] that the Riddler's talking about,' he explains, referring to the cryptic description that might also apply to Batman before it's revealed to be an allusion to Falcone. Reeves and Clark had first suggested a Penguin HBO series while trying to 'get arms around' *The Batman*, says Reeves, but 'DC didn't have that connection then'. Later, when Reeves and Dylan met with Warner Bros. TV, the link was in place through streaming channel

'IN LONG-FORM, YOU CAN GO INTO THE MINUTIAE OF A CHARACTER'S LIFE'

MATT REEVES



Colin Farrell faced hours each day in the make-up chair to transform into Oswald Cobb

Rivals Salvatore Maroni (Clancy Brown) and Oz must form a shaky alliance

of times, and was re-elected after prison because people loved him so much, because he helped the community. That, to me, felt totally in line with who Oz is in my interpretation of him.'

She ponders. 'Oz is a man who would not just want power for power's sake. He's not brutal like Carmine Falcone, who didn't care about people and didn't pretend to. Oz comes from a poor neighbourhood in Gotham and he believes more in the little guy. His greatest want is to be loved and revered. He wants his mom's love more than anybody's.'

Pitch accepted, LeFranc became the showrunner of HBO's prestige show, and decided, along with Reeves, Clark and Farrell, that Craig Zobel (*Mare of Easttown*, *Compliance*), Helen Shaver (*Maid*, *Lovecraft Country*), Kevin Bray (*Loot*, *Succession*) and Jennifer Getzinger (*Ahsoka*, *Mad Men*) would direct the eight episodes.

ROGUES GALLERY

The Penguin opens with Gotham and its citizens suffering. The ripples of the Riddler's act of terrorism are still very much in evidence, and the city's poorest areas are the most affected.

Oswald Cobb grew up in one such spot, Crown Point, but now spies his chance to no longer be the little man. The Falcones are still in power – Carmine's cousin, Luca (Scott Cohen), emerges to pull strings; Carmine's son, Alberto (Michael Zegen), is poised to step into his father's roomy shoes; and Carmine's daughter, Sofia (Cristin Milioti), is fresh out of Arkham – but other crime families are circling. Chief among these are Italian-Iranian syndicate the Maronis. Though still in prison, head honcho Salvatore Maroni (Clancy Brown) has an eye on regaining power after being double-crossed by Carmine Falcone 20 years ago. Cobb, an arch manipulator and strategist, plays both sides against the middle, using his knowledge of the incoming shipment of a new drug as his leverage. But, boy, is he playing with fire.

'Sal ran the illicit drug trade in Gotham and then he got busted – betrayed by Falcone,' says Clancy Brown, whose white hair and whiskers only increase the air of authority he's brought to the screen for 40 years. 'Now Falcone is dead, Sal just figures, "I'm gonna take over."

Son and heir? Alberto Falcone (Michael Zegen)

'HIS GREATEST WANT IS TO BE LOVED AND REVERED – HE WANTS HIS MOM'S LOVE MORE THAN ANYBODY'S'

LAUREN LEFRANC

He's also a psychopath. He's really a bad, bad guy. A very emotional guy. Instinctive, elemental. He loves big and he hates big.'

Though Sal begrudgingly receives prison visits from Oz and enters into a wary alliance with him, his loathing never wavers. 'Sal despises him for all the right reasons and all the wrong reasons,' says Brown. 'He doesn't like that he's chubby, he doesn't like that he's crippled. He knows who he is. He sees what he's doing and he hates it. Very early on, he talks about loyalties and honour. Oz doesn't have any of that. Sal wants to kill him.'

For Sofia Falcone's part, she's as smart and cunning as Oz, with whom she has a complicated history, and is fuelled by a similar rage: like him, she's spent her life being disrespected and discounted, denied a seat at the Falcone table because of her gender. Nicknamed the Hangman, she is thought to be a serial killer – the character appeared in comic-book series *Batman: The Long Halloween* (1996-97), then returned in *Batman: Dark*

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

Rhenzy Feliz plays Oz's assistant Victor Aguilar

Sofia Falcone presents a new kind of threat

Victory (1999–2000), and was previously dramatised in the 2014–19 TV series *Gotham*, played by Crystal Reed, though *The Penguin* offers a twist – but is now at large having been rehabilitated at Arkham State Hospital. Milioti, a standout in an outstanding show, plays Sofia still and interior, a world away from Harley Quinn's flamboyance.

'I worked with this incredible acting coach and movement coach Julia Crockett, and experimented with a lot of physical stuff,' shares Milioti (*Palm Springs*), who was approached to play the part and cemented her involvement after one screen test with Farrell. 'Sofia has a cauldron bubbling inside her at all times, and she's in the most unsafe place she could possibly be. Hong low can she swallow this for, sit on this volcano, until it finally erupts?'

Another key player is Victor Aguilar (Rhenzy Feliz), who Oz finds trying to steal the rims of his purple car ('Technically, it's plum…') in the first episode. Oz almost plugs the kid but, spying hints of a kindred spirit, decides to give him a chance to work his way up in life. Victor ostensibly becomes Oz's driver, but finds himself occupying something like the position of a familiar to a vampire, aiding in the disposal of bodies and more.

'Oz opens his eyes,' says Feliz, who read with Farrell on Zoom to win the, ahem, plum role. 'Oz is like a

SILICONE ALLY

PROSTHETICS AND MAKE-UP DESIGNER MIKE MARINO ON HIS GROUND-BREAKING CREATION, OSWALD COBB...

'We life-casted Colin. He has a great face for make-up. In make-up, you have to add pieces. You can't penetrate the canvas; you can't reduce. I sculpted his nose a bit, I angled his eyebrows, and I started to add some weight.

'Colin's a pretty boy, so I added some acne scars. Al Capone had scars, so I kept that in mind and thought, "How can I incorporate a bird?" I incorporated a penguin and an eagle. In an eagle's life, at a certain point they break their beak off to be reborn. They have this damaged beak, chipped and twisted. I wanted to make his nose look like a beak.

'The first attempt we had [on the movie], it was four hours in the make-up chair. We got faster. The best timing was an hour and 17. Crazy fast. On *The Penguin*, it took almost an hour just to flatten his hair, so it took two-and-a-half hours.

'In the past, the [prosthetic] materials were foam latex. Now, we use silicone. Almost like a vinyl and silicone material. Colin wears silicone pieces on his nose, lip, chin, cheeks, brow, earlobes. And fake eyebrows. And a wig that is tied one hair at a time – human hair. Then he wears a suit that is like couch foam, in pieces, so he can flex and move.

'There are harder parts of silicone and softer parts, different densities around the face, isolating them, so when the person moves you don't get stretching over the nose. It's more like cartilage. I keep any mobile area – creases where they smile – thin, so that their own expressions can come through. What you get is a living person.' **JG**

The series delves deeper into Oz's psychology, after his smash-and-grab appearance in *The Batman*

chess player, the way he's viewing the world of Gotham. He's making moves in advance. Victor's never had the luxury to see that far out. Oz shows him, "If you want something, you got to go out and take it."'

CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE

Cleverly, *The Penguin* is a crime drama, its touchstones not superhero movies but films like *The Long Good Friday*, *Scarface*, *Manhunter*, *Se7en* and Warner Bros. gangster movies from the 30s and 40s. '*The Batman* was a detective/serial-killer noir, this is a gangster noir, a crime-drama noir,' says Reeves, who also points out that it has its own visual language. 'I said to Lauren that it needs to be distinctly its own thing, but of the same world. She talked to Greig Fraser, my cinematographer, and we use the same lenses. When it's in the night world, it's very visually connected. But there are many, many day scenes in *The Penguin*. And Oz's energy is so different, so we brought in hand-held, another visual language.'

What LeFranc has done, though, is put her own spin on crime dramas and gangster movies – and, come to that, comic-book stories. They are often traditionally stories by men about men, with underwritten women.

'Growing up reading comics, I rarely felt as deeply connected to the female characters,' she says. 'If I pictured myself in a role, I pictured myself as a male character because they were more fun and more interesting. I wanted to create a woman in this universe who had that level of depth. Sofia comes out of Arkham State Hospital. What's so interesting about Arkham is it's of a certain time. In that era, women were often placed there because they were "hysterical". What does that even mean, and who decides that?'

Also vital to the storytelling is Oz's relationship with his mother Frances, as played by Deirdre O'Connell (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, the *Daredevil* TV series). 'Their relationship is one of my very favourite things in the show,' says Reeves, and it's an opinion that many viewers are likely to share.

'It's extremely deep, extremely messed-up,' O'Connell says with a huge smile. 'They're in quite the knot. There's the simple version of it, which is: "He has a mum, who's not well [she has dementia], who's quite a piece of work, who's very demanding, and who he feels he owes a nice house to." It could be that simple. But as the story unfolds, you'll find that anything that you think

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

Shohreh Aghdashloo stars as Nadia Maroni

Clancy Brown as Salvatore Maroni

about how this is working is not actually how it's working [laughs]. It goes deep and is awful.'

'It's the darkest thing I've done,' says Farrell. 'I've done a few pieces that are fairly dark – *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*, even *The Banshees of Inisherin* was fucking dark as night – but this was…' He shakes his head like he still can't quite believe it. 'Goddammit, Lauren LeFranc really did get into the weeds of this man's psychology. Lauren pitched me the whole eight hours, man, and I was like, "Have HBO fucking greenlit this fucking thing?" HBO do edgy shit, but the relationship between me and my mother is so fucking dark. But it's earned. None of it felt tricksy. It's basically like any good story, man – it's childhood trauma.'

LeFranc again stresses the importance of bringing a female perspective to this world, and points out that Oz's relationship with his mum, though twisted, is responsible for some good. 'It was important to me that Oz respects women, largely because of his mother. She's so rooted in everything he does.'

Farrell agrees, to a point. 'He operates the club and a few girls who definitely got a few slaps, but he's not a womaniser and he had, in his own mind…' He takes

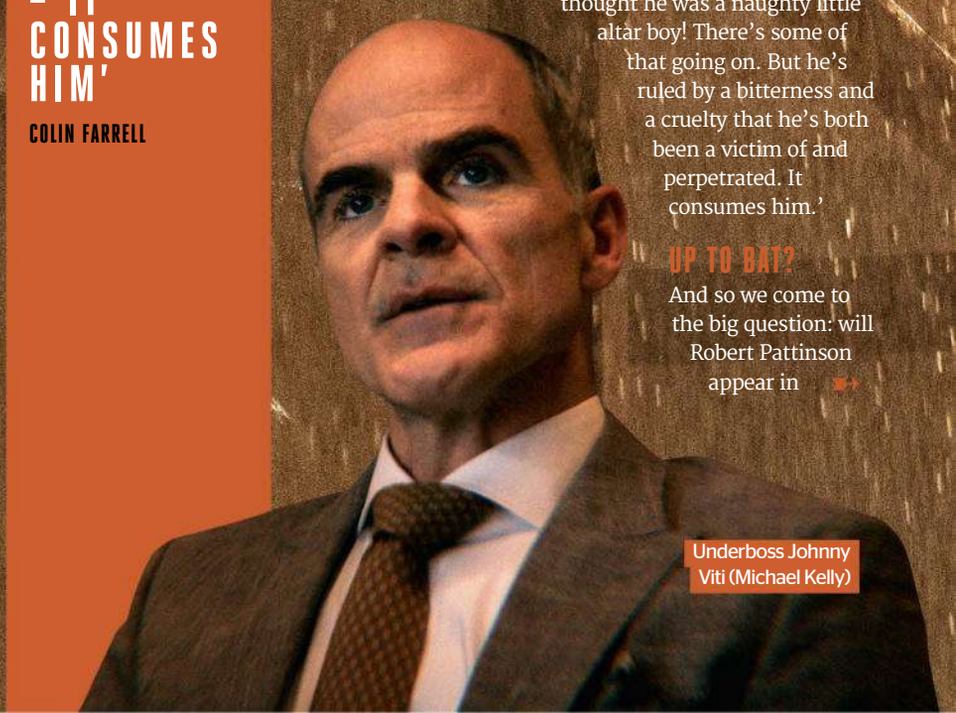
'OZ IS RULED BY A BITTERNESS AND A CRUELTY – IT CONSUMES HIM'

COLIN FARRELL

stock. 'In the source material, he always styled himself as a gentleman of crime. He has a certain reverence for women, and he probably prides himself on that as well. But then you see some of the stuff he does in episode five and six and there's no fucking gentleman in the world… He's like all the Mafia lads. You remember Joe Pesci in *Goodfellas* with his ma? It's fucking beautiful. How sweet he was around her, and how funny – she thought he was a naughty little altar boy! There's some of that going on. But he's ruled by a bitterness and a cruelty that he's both been a victim of and perpetrated. It consumes him.'

UP TO BAT?

And so we come to the big question: will Robert Pattinson appear in



Underboss Johnny Viti (Michael Kelly)

The Penguin? There have been rumours that he does, but no pointers as to whether it's a cameo or something more substantial, and if he'll be in the guise of Batman or Bruce Wayne or both.

Clark bats away the question. 'I'm not going to answer that other than to say that this show is about the psychological examination of the Penguin and the characters around his world, and the movie space is about doing the same with Robert Pattinson and Batman.'

LeFranc likewise chooses not to commit to a definitive answer. 'I understand the desire for everyone to want to see Batman in the show, but I think our characters are just as compelling, or more so,' she says. 'So I can't say "yay" or "nay" to that, but I can say we are following Oz Cobb, and the world he's in. And of course, Batman is in Gotham, but he's in a different part of the city. In the film, Batman is up high, looking down at the city. In our show, we're on the street and Oz is looking up, clawing his way to the top.'

The Gotham landscape has been reshaped – and Oswald Cobb wants control

Same question to Reeves, who's a little more direct in answering. 'I'm a point-of-view filmmaker,' he starts. 'When I'm doing a Batman story, Batman and Bruce is going to be the main point of view. To explore the rogues gallery, they could never get the real estate we can do in a series. So Batman is in this [show] only as a sense that he's a presence. You're aware that all of these events began because of the Riddler, but the Riddler doesn't appear and Batman doesn't appear.'

But how about Bruce? Given the fact that *The Batman*'s last act revealed that many people had their dirty mitts in the pot for the Gotham Renewal Program that Bruce's late father, Thomas Wayne, had set up, perhaps Bruce has a part to play in the reconfiguration of Gotham's underworld? Reeves, a rapid talker, takes a breath. 'Rob is not going to be in the show,' he states. 'I'd rather take the Band-Aid off now. We did talk about all that but we felt the best way to do this was to go on a grand exploration of a guy grabbing for power in this moment.'

BAT MEN

MATT REEVES AND COLIN FARRELL PEEK INTO THE SHADOWS OF *THE BATMAN PART II*...

MATT REEVES

'It's coming along well. We're finishing the script and talking about shooting it next year. It's going to be another detective story, another mystery, another crime story.

'Colin's going to be in the movie, but we're leading into a whole new chapter of the continuation of the story. The reason it's called *The Batman Part II* is because I want the emotional part of the story to be Robert Pattinson's – to be Bruce and Batman's. We didn't do an origin film [with *The Batman*] but we referred to his origin. A lot of times, previously, they've done a thing that once you're past his origin, then it becomes, "Oh, this is the Riddler film," or, "This is the Joker film." I didn't want to do that. I'm excited by the antagonist of the next movie, but I don't want Batman's arc to step back to allow space for another group of characters.'

COLIN FARRELL

'I'm not the centrepiece in the second movie but I'll be there, and not only because I'm contractually obliged and handsomely paid. I love the character. He'll be a different version [than in *The Batman*], for sure. I just saw a scene from the first ep [of *The Penguin*] and a scene from the seventh ep. I thought, 'Ooh, he's light in the first ep. He's still having a bit of a joke, a bit, "Take it easy, sweetheart." That's all gone by the end of the show. It's got a lot more serious and a lot more consequences. Some of the acts he commits... You couldn't keep him jovial. If there was a bit of light in his spirit it's been extinguished and replaced by some other fucking form of existence.' **JG**

Will we see a return to Oz for star Colin Farrell?

What we *can* expect, it seems, is more TV shows that fall under the (ahem again) umbrella of the Batman Epic Crime Saga. 'They vibrate against each other,' says Clark of the TV and theatrical spaces. 'That's the hope. We have the backing from DC and from Max. We came into this not only with ideas of other characters but other areas within Gotham to explore.'

'They built out parts of the city we didn't,' says Reeves of the awfully impressive Gotham City we see in *The Penguin*, which took over entire blocks of New York. 'I wanted people who were watching to not only feel they were leaning into this fictional place that they love from the comics and the movies, but that also it was a Gotham that would be in our country, in this world.'

LeFranc nods, saying that the show's Gotham feels like a real city in the United States, and down different streets lurk other areas and characters. 'Matt's film, our show, are in the Elseworlds,' she says. 'There's absolutely room to expand. That's the beauty of comics, right – all the different issues and the people that you follow.'

Of course, a second season of *The Penguin* could only happen if Farrell is prepared to climb back in the make-up chair. 'I don't know, man,' he grimaces. 'Don't get me wrong – I loved it – but it got in on me a little bit. By the end of it, I was bitching and moaning to anyone who would listen to me that I fucking wanted it to be finished. I tried to remind them that I had "grumpy gratitude". I was still grateful, and still honoured – I grew up watching Burgess Meredith [who played the role in the 1960s TV series], and then Danny DeVito [in Tim Burton's 1992 film *Batman Returns*] was my Penguin – so being a part of the lineage of that storytelling, I really did feel privileged. But by the end of it...'

He practically turns purple at the memory.

'It's not like I didn't know who I was and I was going out and burning cars and shit, but... if you take what Matt Reeves created and then what Lauren did and what Mike did and put them all together, it was a really powerful experience.'

So it's not just the prosthetics and suit that Farrell would have to be willing to get into again, but also the headspace. 'Lauren said, "Look, if I could find a way that makes sense, would you talk about it?" And I said, "Absolutely." And maybe in a year I would. But when I finished I was like, "I never want to put that fucking suit and that fucking head on again."'

THE PENGUIN PREMIERES ON 20 SEPTEMBER ON SKY AND STREAMING SERVICE NOW.

magazinesdirect.com

DISCOVER YOUR NEXT READ

The official home of some of your most loved magazines all in one place. From technology and gaming to the latest celebrity news and health advice, there really is something for everyone.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

www.magazinesdirect.com/official

Shop the entire range online

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE SCI-FI, FANTASY & HORROR MAGAZINE

NEW ISSUE ON SALE NOW!

Subscribe & save at magazinesdirect.com/SFX

© DISNEY/MARVEL STUDIOS, YULIYA TABA, LUMEZIA/GETTY

POLE POSITION

Winner of this year's prestigious Palme d'Or in Cannes, Sean Baker's *Anora* is a loud and lewd love story gone awry, as a Brooklyn pole dancer discovers her Prince Charming is a frog. *Total Film* meets the writer/director and his team to talk dreams, screams and extremes.

WORDS JAMES MOTTRAM

NEON, UNIVERSAL

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

ON

When Sean Baker got the call that he and the crew of his new film *Anora* were required to attend the prize-giving ceremony at this year's Cannes Film Festival, he figured they'd be winning something. 'Never in the world did I think that we'd be taking home the Palme d'Or,' marvels the director, whose only previous Cannes competition entry was 2021's *Red Rocket*. But shortly after George Lucas received an honorary Palme from his old friend Francis Ford Coppola, *Anora* was called.

Three months later, Baker is still trying to process the events of that night, as jury head Greta Gerwig awarded his raucous film the biggest prize in world cinema. 'This is not just a dream. This is *the* dream for me,' he says. 'This was my dream come true. This is what I've been focusing on for the last 30 years. And that is no embellishment there. And I actually thought it was going to happen later in life. I thought I was going to have to travel a very long road and maybe win it at 80.'

When *Total Film* connects with Baker over Zoom, he's just woken up and this is the first interview he's done since Cannes. Dressed in a T-shirt bearing the legend 'Coney Island', he swears it's coincidence. But given *Anora* is set close to the famed amusement park seen in *The Warriors* and so many other movies,

Mikey Madison plays Ani, a lap dancer who marries a rich young Russian

it's hard not to raise a smile. The story of a Brooklyn lap dancer named Anora (or 'Ani' for short) began life, Baker says, with a desire to make a film set in the Russian-American community in New York, specifically Brighton Beach near to Coney Island.

Early ideas included a Russian mafia tale, in which a young bride gets kidnapped and develops Stockholm Syndrome for her captor, in part inspired by the Italian sex comedies Baker was watching when he was making *Red Rocket*. But unwilling to make another 'Russian gangster thing', gradually the story morphed as he hit on a unique idea during a brainstorming session with his producers: 'I said, "What if she marries the son of a Russian oligarch and the parents are unhappy about it?"'

HEY MIKEY

With this idea evolving, Baker set out to find his Ani. Attention turned to Mikey Madison, the rising American star who'd played Sadie, one of Charles Manson's murderous acolytes, in Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, as well as Amber in 2022's horror 'requel' *Scream*. 'She showed that she had the physicality and that she could scream,' smiles Baker, who knew he'd be putting his heroine through the wringer. He pitched the idea to Madison, and it was 'a dream come true' for the actor. 'Are you kidding me?' she cries. 'To have Sean Baker write me a movie [for me]!'

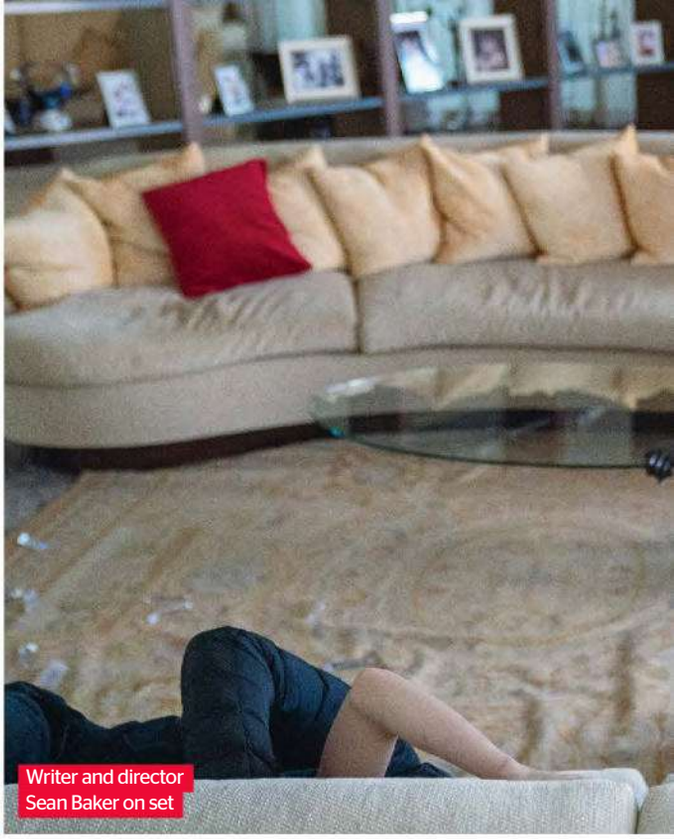
A year later, Baker returned with a script. He took his time, researching it with the help of the film's chief consultant Andrea Werhun, who recently authored *Modern Whore: A Memoir* about her time as an escort and stripper (soon to be a film, which Baker is executive producing). 'She was amazing... giving me little details that I need to flesh out that world, little details that sex workers will point out. Eating out of the Tupperware in the dressing room, in the strip joint... that is a must!'

As well as watching documentaries and reading memoirs, Madison also spoke to consultants 'and made friends with dancers and sex workers', she says. 'They were all very generous with their time, just sharing stories about their life, what it was like, all the nuances of what it's like to be a sex worker. Like, all of those things were most important. It gave me a perspective I wouldn't have had on modern sex work and what it really is like to be a sex worker in New York. It was one of the most important things I did in character.'

Also aiding her performance, Madison trained with a dancer for three months – for what amounted to little more than a 20-second shot of Ani pole dancing. 'I wanted my body to look a certain way,' she says. 'I wanted to have flexibility, and I wanted it to be as realistic as possible and not look like I was straining to look like a dancer... All of that training was important, just for the physicality and how I felt walking around in those heels.'

'Ivan is trying to find freedom, but to be free you have to have some place where you can go back'

MARK EYDELSHTEYN



Writer and director Sean Baker on set

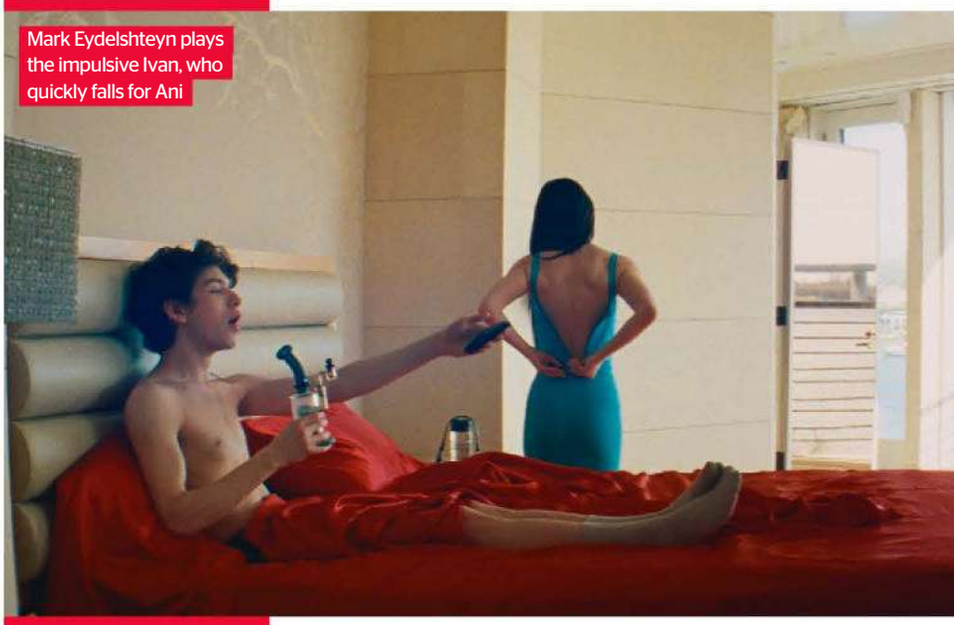
Set in 2019, before the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Baker's story truly takes off when Ani meets the uber-wealthy Ivan in the club where she works. Able to speak Russian, she's thrust into the orbit of this goofy, impulsive 21-year old, who soon implores her to spend a week with him, paying her a cool $15,000. As they begin to bond, he asks her to marry him. Before long, they've flown to Las Vegas to wed.

'She sees him as someone who's very generous,' says Madison, 25. 'He's charming, he's young... I think he's different than a lot of the clients she's had previously. I think she's charmed by him. And because they're so close in age, I think at times, it blurs the line between client and possible boyfriend. He could be someone that she dates outside of her job.'

Trouble starts, however, as Ivan's parents get wind of their impetuous son's behaviour. 'For Ivan, the main thing is freedom,' says Mark Eydelshteyn, the boyish-looking 22-year-old Russian who plays him. 'He's trying to find freedom, but to feel freedom, and to be free, you have to have home, some place where you can go back. But home, it's not the place. It's people, people that you love, and usually it's family, but Ivan has tension in his relationships with the family... They do not love each other.'

They could live happily ever after... if it wasn't for his parents

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS



Mark Eydelshteyn plays the impulsive Ivan, who quickly falls for Ani

Ivan's childish actions tap into one of the film's major themes: whether somebody ever grows up. 'He's the character who defines kidulthood,' says Baker, collapsing into peals of laughter. While this may be new ground for him, *Anora* also touches on a perennial subject for Baker. Like his tale of a transgender sex worker *Tangerine* (2015) or the struggling residents of a shabby motel in *The Florida Project* (2017), he's always been fascinated by those on the fringes. 'Characters we don't think we can normally identify with, I try to make them identifiable,' he says.

'It's a miracle of Sean Baker… He just writes something from his soul, writes something that he can feel,' adds the admiring Eydelshteyn. Here, *Anora* deals very much with the chasm-like disparity between the haves and the have-nots, as Ivan's fearsome mother and father send in their fixer Toros (Baker regular Karren Karagulian) to force Ani into an annulment. She refuses, leading to one insane fight in Ivan's folks' plush mansion, which sees the diminutive Ani do battle against Toros' goons, Igor (*Compartment No.6* star Yura Borisov) and Garnick (Vache Tovmasyan).

FIGHT CLUB

When Madison read the script, she scrawled the word 'scrapper' over it to describe Ani, a word that perfectly encapsulates this staggering scene. 'To me… she's willing to fight tooth and nail, emotionally and physically, for this life… her fairy-tale ending,' says the actor. 'She's not a contemplative person. She's someone who just does it. She says exactly what she's thinking; she acts exactly what she feels she needs to do. She's a very physical person.'

A 28-minute real-time orgy of destruction, the fight sequence saw Madison perform all her own stunts. 'It's unlike anything I've ever done before. There really was no kind of preparation you can do for a scene like that. I fight as hard as I can to get away from Yura, who plays Igor, who's just incredibly strong. So it felt real. It was one of the craziest things I've ever done. It was totally exhilarating. I went home covered in bruises, with a busted ankle, but I was jumping out of bed the next morning to go and do it again.'

Shooting the sequence took over five days, with dialogue in both Russian and Armenian; Baker insisted it was carefully rehearsed, despite the destructive free-for-all. 'A lot of people assume it's just total chaos the whole time [with Sean],' says Drew Daniels, the cinematographer on both *Anora* and *Red Rocket*. 'You're shooting handheld and you're just improvising everything. But it's actually not like that at all. He's very meticulous. He's very concerned with composition and mise en scène and very specific about camerawork.'

Daniels was also taken with Baker's approach when it came to seeking out unusual locations across Coney Island. Getting in a van together on the scout, 'we'd end up in these places, meeting these people and sharing stories with these individuals that you would never in a million years meet otherwise. And it just feels like a really interesting perspective, a very privileged perspective, to get to be a part of this world.' Baker, who grew up in New Jersey, simply shrugs. 'I thought I could bring something a little new to it.'

Now *Anora* is set to hit cinemas, with the posters all carrying the Palme d'Or crest. 'I think it feels really big,' says Daniels, passionately. 'It feels like a victory for cinema, for independent cinema or small indie films, for original scripts, for auteur directors and for American cinema. This film is as American independent cinema as it gets. When I think of an indie filmmaker, I think of Sean Baker and him winning the Palme… It's so deserved. And I think it's a big breath of fresh air for American cinema, for indies and for original storytelling. It felt very important.' Amen to that.

'She's willing to fight tooth and nail for this life… her fairy-tale ending'

MIKEY MADISON

ANORA OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 1 NOVEMBER.

Anora is set among the Russian-American community near Coney Island

REAL STEEL

HE MADE THE WORLD BELIEVE A MAN COULD FLY, BUT NEW DOC *SUPER/MAN: THE CHRISTOPHER REEVE STORY* REVEALS THE HERO BENEATH THE CAPE. *TOTAL FILM* MEETS THE TEAM IMMORTALISING AN ICON.

WORDS JORDAN FARLEY

Contrary to what you might expect, *Super/Man* is not a documentary about *Superman*. Richard Donner's 1978 classic was an effects marvel, a proof of concept for today's superhero industrial complex and a launchpad for its statuesque, magnetic leading man Christopher Reeve. The documentary *Super/Man: The Christopher Reeve Story* starts not with the soaring highs of that trailblazing blockbuster, which launched its nascent star into the stratosphere, but with the 1995 equestrian accident that shattered Reeve's first and second vertebrae and left him paralysed from the neck down.

'You start with somebody who awakes from a coma, and discovers that he can't even move his little finger. He can't breathe on his own. There's no more superpowers,' says co-director Peter Ettedgui who, alongside co-director Ian Bonhôte, previously helmed the documentaries *McQueen* (2018) and *Rising Phoenix* (2020). 'And then you take him from the point of maximum despair where he's actually contemplating suicide by having his life support switched off, to a point where he realises that he can harness who he was as Superman to actually do something extraordinary in the world. So it seemed to us like that was an incredibly hopeful story.'

Beloved around the world for his on-screen heroics as the indestructible Kryptonian, it's the extraordinary real-life heroism of Reeve's latter days – disability advocacy, activist fundraising for medical research, and finding a reason to live after personal catastrophe – that leave a lasting impression in *Super/Man*. Reeves spent nine years using a wheelchair following his accident until his death in 2004. It is Ettedgui and Bonhôte's belief that if you want to know the person beneath the spandex, it's on full display during this period.

'It's almost his character showing through, because his physicality had diminished to its lowest point,' says Bonhôte over Zoom. 'It's all about his spirit, his desire, and wanting to change the world. We wanted to be careful to not just start with him as this beautiful, perfect person, and then having the other half of the film with him in the wheelchair. We thought it'd be more important to constantly remind you of what he had lost by bringing in Superman within the structure [of the film], post-accident.'

As the story of Reeve's injury, rehabilitation and renewed purpose in life unfolds in rough chronological order, Ettedgui and Bonhôte's elegantly constructed narrative jumps around in time, flashing back to cover Reeve's sudden superstardom following the release of *Superman: The Movie* and subsequent career struggles – a rise-and-fall that mirrors his later fall-and-rise. 'That story of becoming Superman and the story of him having an injury at a low point – we felt that those two stories could work beautifully in harmony

SEAMUS RYAN PHOTOGRAPHY. EVA SERENY. WARNER BROS.

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

Co-directors Peter Ettedgui and Ian Bonhôte

Reeve with then-partner Gae Exton and their children

with each other,' Ettedgui explains. 'It was a very natural way for us to introduce and then keep running the story of how he became Superman, and then, eventually, became very frustrated and depressed with it.'

MAN OF TOMORROW

Made with the cooperation and close involvement of the Reeves estate, including his three adult children Will (the spitting image of his father), Matthew and Alexandra – who feature extensively – there was a commitment from all involved that the film not veer into blinkered hagiography. Reeve's controversial position within the disabled community as a figure who pushed for cure over care, for example, is sensitively addressed. As is his unilateral choice to end his relationship with Gae Exton, the mother of his first two children, despite resentment towards his own upbringing in a fractured family.

'[The children have] been contacted repeatedly since their father's passing in 2004,' Bonhôte says. 'People tried to make a film about him, and they were not ready. They needed to be right in their own minds and in their own lives. Which meant that they could look back at their past – like all of us, later on in our life, when we can be like, "This was wrong. This was bad. This was good. This was less good."'

The involvement of the family meant that Ettedgui and Bonhôte had access to a treasure trove of archive materials. 'More than we could ever need,' says Bonhôte – a stark contrast to the 'five frames of home movie archive' they had to work with on *McQueen*. Among the 'boxes and boxes' of material that filled their office kitchen from floor to ceiling were 'letters and documents that really took you through his whole life', everything from university essays about Freud to handwritten drafts of break-up letters.

'Chris bought, in the later years of his life, pre-accident, a Hi8 camera to record everything. So that's why there's all that amazing footage,' notes Bonhôte. The incredibly intimate and raw recordings of Reeve post-accident, meanwhile, come from eldest son Matthew, who made two unreleased films about his father's rehabilitation, shot by a professional DoP. 'It's thousands and thousands of hours he spent with his dad,' Bonhôte says. 'There's that intimacy that Matthew could get to, and just getting his dad to share completely. Some people have said, "It almost feels like you were there with them filming."'

> 'LIFE AS A QUADRIPLEGIC IS SUPER-TOUGH AND YOUR CLOSE PEOPLE HAVE TO SACRIFICE EVERYTHING FOR THAT PERSON'
>
> IAN BONHÔTE

Claiming to have left enough material on the cutting room floor for a 'three-part documentary', the directors never wavered from their cinematic vision for the film despite difficult days in the edit. 'I remember, we did a final trawl through some of the material that hit the edit floor with our editor and we were almost crying,' Ettedgui recalls. 'There were images and moments that were just so beautiful.' But as the directors point out, for many their relationship with Reeve and Superman was forged on the big screen, and any document of Reeve's life needed to be told with cinematic intent. It proved to be a vision supported by new DC chiefs James Gunn and Peter Safran, who were 'passionate about giving it a theatrical life' upon viewing the film shortly after its Sundance premiere.

'This film can take it. It can take that size and ambition because of the subject,' says Ettedgui. 'I remember when we first talked to [composer] Ilan [Eshkeri] about the music, and he had composed a very beautiful theme. But it was pretty, and slightly more appropriate for a streaming release. We said, "Look, you need to go bigger. It needs to have that…"' 'John Williams,' Bonhôte says, jumping in to finish the sentence. 'Ilan, who is more than capable, just rose to that challenge,' Ettedgui continues. 'That's the one thing we were trying to do with everyone on the team. It was saying, "Look, let's really elevate this. Let's make it into the most maximal, emotional experience we can for an audience."'

A younger Christopher Reeve, bulking up

SHOW OF STRENGTH

If one word sums up the experience of watching *Super/Man* it's 'emotional'. There are the well-known fairy-tale moments, such as Reeve returning to public life at the 1996 Academy Awards while being cheered on by an audience of his teary-eyed peers. Less well-known, perhaps, is Reeve's close

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

Reeve directing Glenn Close on the set of his 1997 film *In the Gloaming*

friendship with Robin Williams. Pals since rooming together at Juilliard in 1973, Williams always gave Reeve something to smile about, even in the aftermath of the accident when he turned up in Reeve's hospital room as a bungling Russian proctologist. But few moments hit harder than Reeve's children recalling his shockingly sudden final hours, and the tragic death of their mother Dana Reeve from lung cancer a little over a year later.

'When they're going to share that with you, you need to be very responsible to receive that, and to use that in the most elegant, eloquent way,' Bonhôte says. 'It really needs to hit hard in the film, because people are sharing something really difficult for them. I don't think they care at all about the financial side of the film and the rest of it. They really felt, the three of them, that their father's legacy hadn't been portrayed, and it was a really good time to do that.'

Reeve's time in the spandex may only be part of a much larger tapestry, but for *Superman* super-fans, there are several fresh additions to the movie's mythos. One example: shortly before Reeve flew to London to screen-test, William Hurt – his co-star at the time in an off-Broadway play – implored the 26-year-old rising star not to go and 'sell out'. Reeve didn't listen, of course, and the rest is history. 'That was pretty mind-blowing,' says Ettedgui with a chuckle.

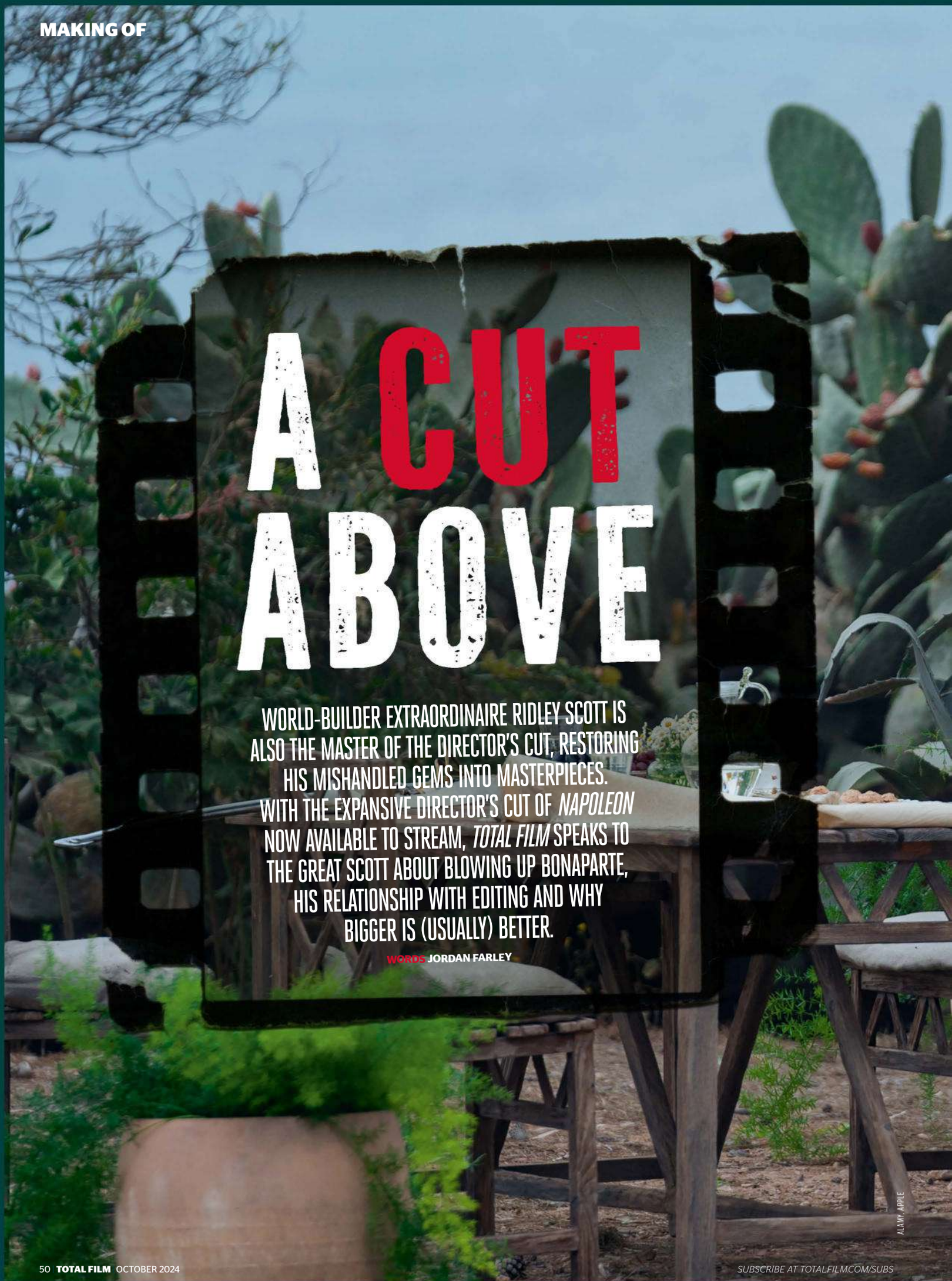
But the real insights gleaned from the film are personal, even when framed through pop-culture legend, including Reeve's shifting perception of what it means to be a hero. 'Chris talks about the hero in the age of Superman, and the hero in the age of his disability, and the fact that heroism is about the ordinary person confronting difficulties and troubles in the way that we all do,' says Ettedgui. 'In the film you just see a series of people that illustrate exactly that,' adds Bonhôte. 'Life as a quadriplegic is super-tough and your close people have to sacrifice everything for that person. Those people are heroes.'

What's clear is that even though Reeve wasn't *technically* Superman, his influence around the world was just as profound. 'He didn't live to his 80s, but for the 52 years of his life he really marked people,' says Bonhôte. 'Actually, that reminds me,' adds Ettedgui. 'Chris had this quote framed on his desk from Abraham Lincoln, which was: "When I do good, I feel good. When I do bad, I feel bad." And that's the credo that, in a way, he lived by.'

SUPER/MAN: THE CHRISTOPHER REEVE STORY OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 1 NOVEMBER.

With Reeve's younger son, Will

Reeve didn't let his injuries hold him back, pouring his efforts into disability activism



A CUT ABOVE

WORLD-BUILDER EXTRAORDINAIRE RIDLEY SCOTT IS ALSO THE MASTER OF THE DIRECTOR'S CUT, RESTORING HIS MISHANDLED GEMS INTO MASTERPIECES. WITH THE EXPANSIVE DIRECTOR'S CUT OF *NAPOLEON* NOW AVAILABLE TO STREAM, *TOTAL FILM* SPEAKS TO THE GREAT SCOTT ABOUT BLOWING UP BONAPARTE, HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH EDITING AND WHY BIGGER IS (USUALLY) BETTER.

WORDS **JORDAN FARLEY**

ALAMY, APPLE

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

Back in 2023, Ridley Scott let *Total Film* in on a little secret. Alongside the 157-minute theatrical cut of *Napoleon*, he was working on a director's cut of the film that would release on Apple TV+ following its cinematic run. After a longer road to release than anticipated (Scott did have a certain swords-and-sandals sequel to keep him busy: see p12), *Napoleon: The Director's Cut* has dropped online like the oblique blade of a guillotine across a deposed queen's neck.

Adding 48 minutes of new footage, *Napoleon*'s new cut significantly expands the presence of Vanessa Kirby's Josephine, and adds the brief but beautiful Battle of Marengo, a thrilling assassination attempt and a harrowing new sequence during the invasion of Russia, enriching an already terrific picture. A film we called 'one of Ridley Scott's best films in almost two decades' in our review is now unquestionably his best since, well, the director's cut of *Kingdom of Heaven*.

Speaking from the HQ of his production company Scott Free in early August, shortly after screening the new cut of *Napoleon* for *TF*, Scott was on typically entertaining form, fully aware that at 86 years old he is a living legend; one who knows what makes a great movie, even if scissor-happy studios don't always agree.

Why did you feel that *Napoleon* warranted the director's-cut treatment?

Well, you could do a film that ran a week about Napoleon Bonaparte. Really, the biggest challenge is: how the hell do I narrow this down? The story of Napoleon is so complex, and I only wanted to look at the man. Not so much the battles, but more the man, and what makes him tick, and his obsession with somebody called Josephine.

Vanessa Kirby's Josephine gets a lot of extra screen time in the Director's Cut…

The extra [48 minutes] is not entirely devoted to Josephine, but it's devoted to them, together. You start to get 'who, what, where, and why?' Some may prefer it as a cut, and, that said, I think I do.

The Battle of Marengo is a short but impactful new addition. Why reinstate it?

I acknowledge Marengo just to say, 'And there were more [battles].' It's pretty spectacular. You can't tell *Napoleon* without talking about the battles – and the 66 battles are over a pretty short space of time. So I've got to be very selective there as well. You can't sit there for 10 weeks watching battle after battle. And, also, violence gets boring. Have you noticed that? There's a lot of movies out now which are all about violence, and all about action, and I can't watch them.

We see the full extent of the hardships that pushed Napoleon to abandon the invasion of Russia in the director's cut. Did you consider it too brutal for the theatrical cut?

It's worse than that. I begin Waterloo with him on the lavatory [laughs]. He's actually bleeding from the ass. He has piles. And piles can easily develop as a horseman. So he bled from the ass. When he's in Russia, there's blood on the saddle. And then someone looks in and says, 'Piles, my lord!' Everybody thought it was so comical to start off the Battle of Waterloo with piles. I thought it was great. That's life, man.

Is there any part of you that laments not being able to show your director's cuts in cinemas, out of the gate?

Yes. But, actually, thank God for the platforms, because I embrace any way you can show a film, whether it's in cinema – which I would always embrace as choice number one. But, number two, is the platforms, which really save these films, because the quality of the platforms is better than it is on celluloid. A good TV set doesn't cost anything today. I've got a set that's 5ft across. It's frankly as good as any screen. So if you're a TV watcher, put your hand in your pocket, and buy a proper goddamn TV.

Which do you consider your more successful director's cuts?

I did another film where we removed 45 minutes of the movie, and shouldn't have done – it's called *Kingdom of Heaven* [2005]. So now you get, in that story, what happened to the princess of Jerusalem. That's true. She euthanised her child, because she knew he had leprosy. The problem here is, it ends up – and always will be – art against commerce.

Joaquin Phoenix headlines Ridley Scott's epic, which now runs at 205 minutes

Is that why several of your films are only later released intact?

I'm not saying I do art, but I try. Occasionally, I circle art. But I've always got a mind on my audience, because I'm in deep respect of anybody who's prepared to give me money for my next budget. So I try to be responsible and a partner in that process, so that I get what I want, and they get what they want. It's an interesting equation because you can't say, "Fuck you." You're not going to win.

The new version of *Napoleon* goes deeper psychologically – and adds more action

Rutger Hauer and Harrison Ford in the seminal *Blade Runner*

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

It's an incredible luxury to be able to cut 48 minutes given the time and costs involved in making a film at this level. Are you ruthless in the editing room?
'Ruthless' is a bad word. I'm good at stepping back and looking in. I don't get buried in the film any more. The danger is, when I began doing commercials, I'd sit there, literally in the edit, and do every frame with the editor. Then the films, it was the same thing. I think it was *Black Rain* [1989] that I started to ease back. I had a great editor called Tom Rolf, and I left him to it, maybe because he was so grumpy. I would give him space. And then he cut the movie, and I went, 'Christ, that's great. I didn't realise the film was going to be so good.'

What I'm saying is: you need a great editor, and not to go into the editing room until the editor says, 'OK, I've got a scene. I've got a reel. Do you want to see it?' Because once I've prepared casting, recce'd it, and shot it, I'm so buried in it. I'm numb to what I've just done. It's best to hand it over to a fresh mind, and let them get to it. And then I'm fresh to see what they've done with it.

The *Blade Runner* director's cut and later Final Cut may be the greatest vindication in film history for the original vision of a filmmaker over a studio-compromised theatrical cut.
Well, there's a very good doc on the critic Pauline Kael. Seen it? Watch it. I hadn't even met her. And I read this four-page [review] in *The New Yorker*, which is a very posh piece of real estate. There's four pages of destruction. Absolute destruction. She was destructive enough to affect the outgoing of a film, which only was discovered again by accident, with the Santa Monica Film Festival. They lost a negative. So, actually, it's a nice reprise, but it's a pity it didn't work at the time. Because I knew I'd done something very special. How could you not? Hampton Fancher [screenwriter] and I slaved over that.

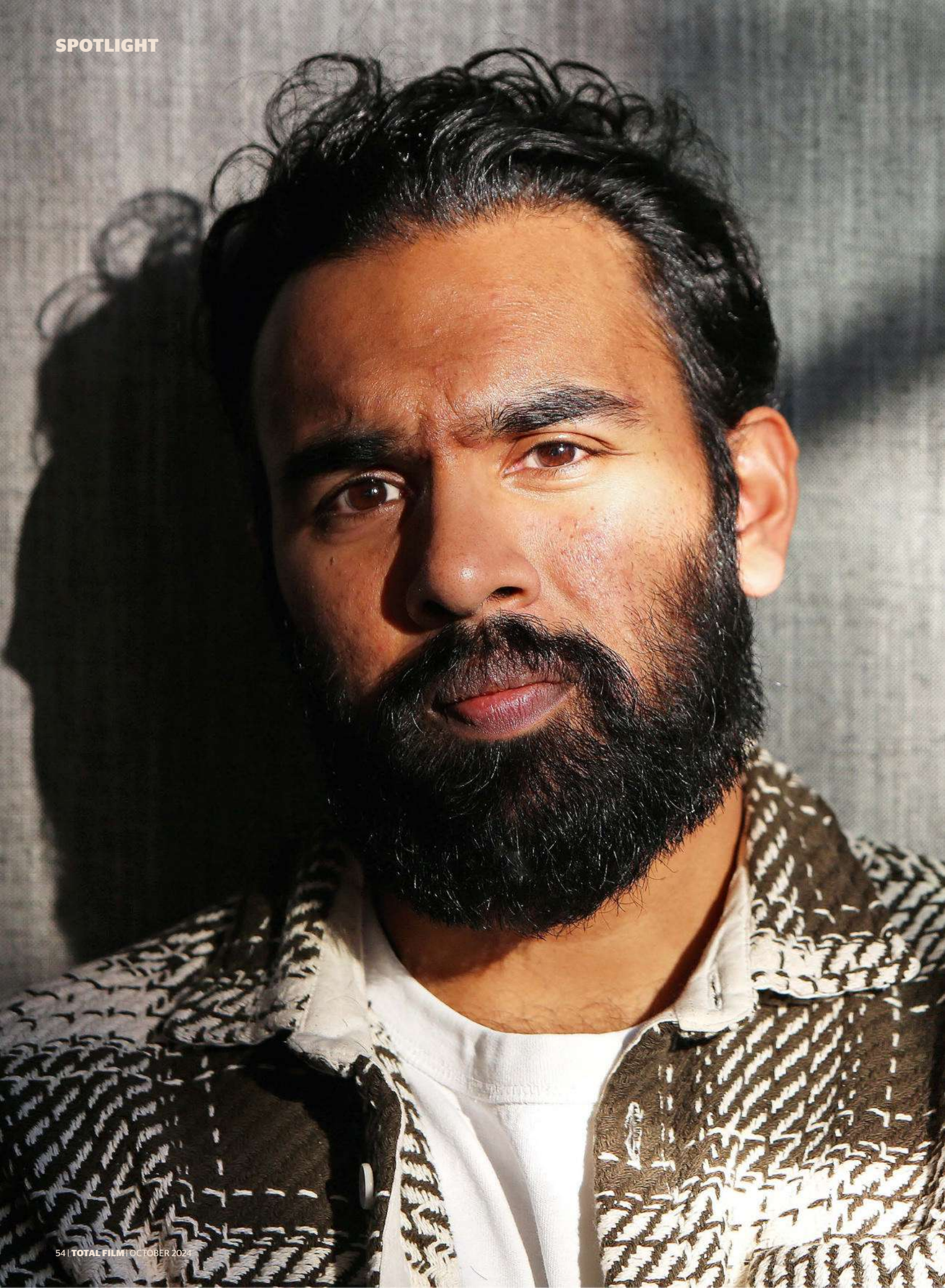
The director's cut of *Alien* makes very few changes. Did you get it right the first time?
It's great going through this, because I was very much in the editing room all the time [on *Alien*]. I took the film to a guy who'd never edited a film before, but he'd done my music editing on *The Duellists*. Because of that, I was in there all day, all night. And, from that, we thought we had a fantastic cut. Fantastic. The studio saw it and said, 'Gee, nothing happens for 45 minutes.' I said, 'Are you fucking joking?' Jerry Goldsmith had done the best score maybe of his fucking life. His score is chillingly, classically beautiful. And that's where I went, 'I'm going to have a fight here.'

Are there any films you've wanted to go back to and give the director's-cut treatment? Is there a director's cut of *The Duellists* or *Thelma & Louise* or *Black Rain* in you?
No, I think they're all pretty good. I'm serious. I think they're pretty fucking good.

When you spoke to us about your director's cut of *Napoleon* last year you mentioned a 250-minute cut. Will that extra footage be seen?
We cut a four-hour version. So if this goes well I think: why wouldn't they do it? It doesn't cost anything. All you do is press a button. If you like the long version, then there's a four-hour version. You'd have to [colour grade it], that would have to be done. You have to mix it. The four-hour version is always on the Avid, on the machine. I would like to go more into it.

NAPOLEON: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT IS STREAMING ON APPLE TV+ NOW.

Kingdom of Heaven, starring Orlando Bloom, was reappraised following the release of an extended edit



Lucky Man

He broke out in Beatles jukebox musical *Yesterday* and has a varied slate of juicy projects on the horizon, including a very different take on a superhero franchise. But, as the ever-humble Himesh Patel tells *Total Film*, he puts a lot of it down to luck...

WORDS MATT MAYTUM
PORTRAIT CLARA MOLDEN

It's August 2024, and Himesh Patel is enjoying the quiet before the storm. While he's not shooting anything at this precise moment, he's gearing up for promo mode on a trio of new projects. 'I have three things coming out, all being publicised in quick succession,' he says. When *Total Film* quips it's often the way that an actor's long-gestating work ends up being released close together, he's quick to caveat: 'If you're lucky. I feel very lucky to have that.'

Luck's a subject that Patel returns to again and again, whether it's modesty or a clear-eyed appreciation of how timing and circumstances influence anyone's life. 'It's not intentional on my part in any sort of calculated way,' he says of his sudden influx of projects. 'As lucky as I am to be a consistently working actor, I don't think I'm quite at the point of like, "Fifty people want to work with me. I'll pick..."'

Despite those claims, Patel has worked consistently since breaking out in his feature film debut, *Yesterday*. Coming soon is *The Franchise* – a new large-scale TV show from Armando Iannucci, whose *Avenue 5* Patel previously appeared in. It's co-created by Jon Brown (*Succession*) and film and theatre legend Sam Mendes. Savagely skewering a very Marvel-esque production, the show casts Patel as Daniel, the first assistant director on what's proving to be (to put it politely) a shitshow.

Patel leads an impressive ensemble, with Daniel's role as first AD giving him insider insight on the whole production: wrangling actors (Billy Magnussen, Katherine Waterston, Richard E. Grant), assuaging the ego of the artistically inclined director (Daniel Brühl), and acting as a human shield when the execs visit the set. It's a role he prepared for, unwittingly, via osmosis.

'I knew that there would be stuff that would just come out naturally, because I've been working on a set for half my life,' he tells *TF*, speaking from his London home, casual in a cream sweatshirt. 'So I've been around

CLARA MOLDEN/CAMERA PRESS. COLIN HUTTON/HBO. SIGNATURE. ALAMY

With screen wife Lily James in *Greedy People*

ADs and first ADs and that environment. It's kind of home to me, really. I think I just trusted that I've got the amalgamation of every first AD I've worked with over the years.'

The Franchise will no doubt have viewers wondering how close it cleaves to the truth of huge-scale franchise productions. 'There were times when we'd go over it, some of us actors, and be like, "Is this real…?" And, of course, you push it a little bit further, probably, for comedy. But it's based on reality. A lot of these things are based on stories that they have experienced first-hand, or things that they've heard from people during their research. A lot of it is not as far from reality as you would imagine.'

It hasn't quite put Patel off from wanting to get into a franchise himself, though. His character – despite all the stress and eye-rolling – is a comic-book nerd who loves getting involved in the circus of blockbuster filmmaking, and believes that when you make a film like this that's actually good, there's nothing better. 'I kind of believe that as well,' Patel admits. 'I'm certainly not put off from wanting to be part of something like that. But it does make me go, "It's got to be a good one…"'

'THERE WERE TIMES WHEN WE'D GO OVER IT, SOME OF US ACTORS, AND BE LIKE, "IS THIS REAL…?"'

'ENDERS GAME

On the other end of the scale is the comedic crime caper *Greedy People*, which reunites Patel with his *Yesterday* co-star Lily James. The pair play a married couple, living in a fictional town broadly similar to Wilmington, North Carolina, where the film was shot. He's Will, a somewhat-green police officer partnered with law-unto-himself Terry (an against-type Joseph Gordon-Levitt). Before you can say 'Coen brothers', there's an accidental death, a mysterious pile of cash and more than one characterful hitman, all caught up in a chaotically tangled web. 'For me, it's a dark comedy, because there's not much comedy played for laughs in that way,' says Patel. 'But you kind of can't help but laugh at the idiocy of some of these people.'

Patel's starring role in *Yesterday* was his big breakthrough

The Franchise tackles extended-universe movies from behind the lens

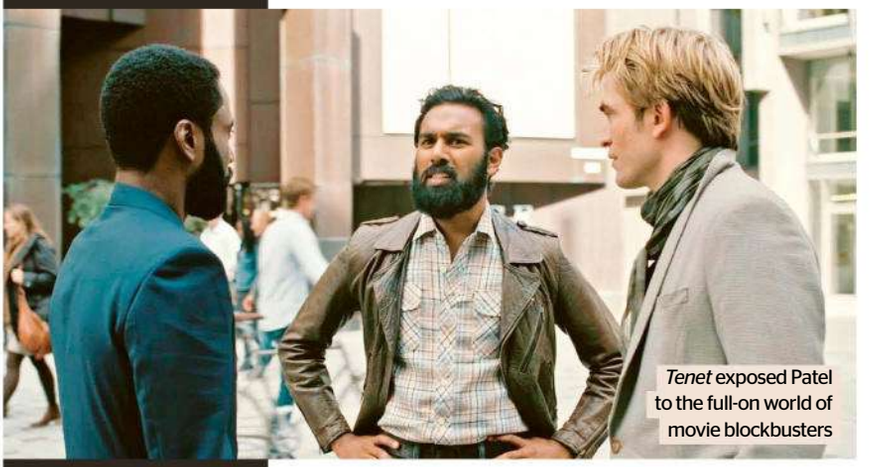
The role required the 33-year-old Brit to adopt another American accent, something he can do with relative ease now, after the effort he put into getting it right on the superb pandemic-themed TV show *Station Eleven*. 'And, actually, on this one, Lily and I sort of made a deal with each other,' he smiles. 'People staying in accents, it just makes us cringe. But we were like, "If you do it, I'll do it." So we did do our best to stick to the accent in-between takes, which, even saying that, makes me cringe. But sometimes it's necessary.'

Patel's straight-talking, no-nonsense approach was possibly honed over the nine years he spent as a soap actor, playing *EastEnders*' Tamwar Masood from 2007 to 2016. 'A lot of the actors that I worked with on that were the ones who really shaped me when I was at my most malleable, as it were,' he muses. 'I was 16 years old when I started. I really count my lucky stars that I was surrounded by a lot of very sensible people – and very good actors who weren't tempted by the world of celebrity or the trappings of fame.'

Being a soap actor – beamed into the nation's living rooms several nights a week all year long – can be a blessing and a curse. It's regular, high-profile work, but can lead to hard-to-shift typecasting. Yet Patel's made that transition look easy. 'I thought it was going to be impossible,' he says of breaking out. 'I had no expectation that I would get to do what I'm doing now.'

In the end, it came down to 'a leap of faith', into a future where nothing was promised. 'Touch wood, it's been really great so far. I feel really lucky that's the way things have lined up for me. I think it was the right time and the right place for a lot of this stuff. You hear a lot of actors say this, but half of it is really luck. You can

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS



Tenet exposed Patel to the full-on world of movie blockbusters

Patel 's Tamwar at the funeral of Lucy Beale in *EastEnders*

prepare for luck, as it were, but you really do have to be in the right place at the right time.'

NEW BEATLE

There were some short films and a couple of telly roles, but it was as the lead in *Yesterday* that Patel broke big. That film was always going to get huge amounts of attention, given that it was the union of director Danny Boyle, screenwriter Richard Curtis and the Beatles' songbook. Once again, good fortune might have helped – Boyle was on the panel at a film festival where a short Patel appeared in, *Two Dosas*, won a prize – but Patel remains cool when reflecting on the pressure of starring in a film burdened with such iconic British talent.

'[Boyle and Curtis are] not ego-first people at all,' he explains. 'It just felt like they gave me the time and the space I needed to prepare, and supported me in any way I needed to be supported. And that really meant that I didn't have to think too much about the pressure.'

'I WAS LIKE A KID IN A CANDY SHOP. I STILL PINCH MYSELF ABOUT IT'

After that, a slate of diverse projects has followed, from cool TV (*Black Mirror*, the aforementioned *Station Eleven*) to films of varying scale. He even appeared in *Tenet*, taking part in one of Christopher Nolan's biggest-ever set pieces, in which a 747 plane was crashed. 'My first day on set was on the Amalfi Coast, and I was on a speedboat, and [Nolan] was in a helicopter with an IMAX camera strapped to the front of it. And I was like a kid in a candy shop, honestly. I still pinch myself about it.'

While *Tenet* was a uniquely standalone blockbuster, when it comes to franchise fare, Patel had an end-credits cameo in *Enola Holmes 2*, as John Watson to Henry Cavill's Sherlock and Millie Bobby Brown's super-sleuth sis. 'I think the hope is that we get to go into that world again at some point, but it's quite hard when the two leads are two of the most famous and in-demand actors in the world,' smiles Patel. 'Hopefully, we will eventually [make another], because I think those two movies are really good. I'd love to get to do more than half a day's work on an *Enola* movie. That would be fun.'

On the more immediate horizon, Patel has also completed a film with Elizabeth Olsen and Alicia Vikander. *The Assessment*, directed by first-timer Fleur Fortuné, will have premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival by the time you read this. 'It's more or less a three-hander,' explains Patel. 'It's got a dystopian sort of setting, but it's still very human issues. It's in a world where birth is basically outlawed, so you have to go through a process called "the assessment" to see if you're fit to be a parent.' Again, the L word comes up. 'I felt so lucky to be working so closely with them… To watch them work, and see how they build a character, and also fight their corner for their character as you go through a scene or go through a day's work. They do it really respectfully and really intelligently.'

And, after playing a first AD in *The Franchise*, Patel might find himself on the other side of the camera eventually too. He's been working on a screenplay, adapting the book *Brown Baby* with his friend (and the book's author) Nikesh Shukla. 'I've always wanted to write, and it's been a confidence thing,' says Patel. 'He's been a wonderful friend and has really taken me under his wing. So I'm working on that now.

'And I would love to direct [in the future], but I also don't take directing lightly. I think it's an amazing skill. You kind of realise the amount of decisions that you have to make, and the time you have to commit to it and everything. I think maybe it'll come later down the line.' Well, with any luck…

THE FRANCHISE IS COMING SOON TO SKY COMEDY AND STREAMING SERVICE NOW. GREEDY PEOPLE IS AVAILABLE ON DIGITAL FROM 27 SEPTEMBER.

BLOOD PRESS

BASED ON STEPHEN KING'S MOST INFLUENTIAL BOOK AND WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY *IT* SCRIBE GARY DAUBERMAN, VAMPIRE MOVIE *SALEM'S LOT* FACED AN UNHOLY FIGHT TO GET TO OUR SCREENS. *TOTAL FILM* HUNTS DOWN DAUBERMAN AND STARS LEWIS PULLMAN AND MAKENZIE LEIGH TO LEARN ALL THAT WAS AT STAKE...

WORDS **JAMIE GRAHAM**

JUSTIN LUBIN/WARNER BROS

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

On 19 February, horror legend Stephen King took to X: 'Between you and me, Twitter, I've seen the new *Salem's Lot* and it's quite good. Old-fashioned horror filmmaking: slow build, big pay-off. Not sure why WB is holding it back; not like it's embarrassing or anything. Who knows. I just write the fucking things.'

No one, it seems, knew just what was happening with Gary Dauberman's adaptation of King's beloved 1975 novel about vampires taking over a small town in Maine. Announced in April 2019 and commencing principal photography in September 2021, it was set for theatrical release in September 2022, but delayed due to COVID-related hitches in post-production. And then… silence. Sure, there was the pandemic and the 2023 SAG-AFTRA strike, but this mystery went deeper, and strangely chimed with the book's genesis.

'In the early 1800s a whole sect of Shakers, a rather strange, religious persuasion at best, disappeared from their village (Jeremiah's Lot) in Vermont. The town remains uninhabited to this day,' wrote King in a 1969 column for his campus newspaper at the University of Maine. It was this *Mary Celeste*-style enigma that inspired both his epistolary short story *Jerusalem's Lot* (available in the 1978 *Night Shift* collection), and the dense, detailed novel of *'Salem's Lot*.

In all probability, Dauberman's movie vanished due to the restructuring of the Warner Bros. Discovery conglomerate. This was the same company that was behind the *Batgirl* and *Coyote vs. Acme* movies, both of which were infamously shelved as tax write-offs. Would such a fate befall *Salem's Lot*? fretted King's legion of fans. But the author's tweet seemed to suddenly get the wheels of industry turning: Dauberman's movie, the first based on a book that has twice been adapted into a miniseries (Tobe Hooper's 1979 iteration and a 2004 effort starring Rob Lowe), was announced to be landing on streaming platform Max in the US, and would receive a cinema release in the UK.

'I'm extremely thankful for Steve's support,' Dauberman tells *Total Film*, though he's far too diplomatic to get into the guts of the matter. 'Let's just say it provided some shock support for some of the more

Mark (Jordan Preston Carter) and teacher Matthew (Bill Camp) make a terrifying discovery

Susan spots Ben's literary credentials

bumpy portions of this journey and leave it at that.'

HOME INVASION

King regards *'Salem's Lot* as one of his favourite novels, while biographer Douglas E. Winter calls it, 'The single most influential of his books upon other writers of horror fiction.' It tells of writer Ben Mears (played in the new film by Lewis Pullman), who returns to his small home town of Jerusalem's Lot after 25 years away. King paints a textured, lyrical picture of a community that's infiltrated by an exotic evil when the long-deserted Marsten House, looming over the town, is purchased by antiques dealer Richard Straker (Pilou Asbæk), who, it transpires, acts as the Renfield-style familiar for ancient bloodsucker Kurt Barlow (Alexander Ward). King had read Lovecraft and Poe and all of the Gothic novelists, but it was Richard Matheson's post-apocalyptic 1954 novel *I Am Legend*, set in Gardena, California, that pointed the way: 'I knew instinctively that I was trying to find a way to get home, to where I belonged,' he said, and *'Salem's Lot* transposed European lore into a Norman Rockwell setting.

For Dauberman, though, King's novel was not the starting point. 'My first exposure to *Salem's Lot* was the '79 miniseries when they replayed it on TV at some point in the mid 80s,' he recalls. 'I was probably only eight or nine at the time and it left a big impression on me. That moment when Mark wakes up to see his dead friend tapping on his bedroom window… It has stayed with me ever since. I didn't realise it was a book at the time, not until a few years later when I started devouring anything written by Stephen King.'

This life-long passion for King informed Dauberman's screenplays for Andy Muschietti's *It* and *It Chapter Two*, the smash-hit adaptations of the author's 1986 tome that launched a King-naissance and helped get *Salem's Lot* greenlit in the first place. And just as those movies had luxuriated in nostalgia (their 80s-set, childhood segments are impeccable), *Salem's Lot* hits a sweet spot by retaining the novel's 70s setting, where fashions flare, music rocks and even the sunlight seems a little more yellow and mellow.

Into this world (shot primarily in Ipswich, Massachusetts) drives Ben. 'Gary said he wanted to find someone you could believe could change a tyre,' says Pullman, best known for playing Lt. Robert Floyd – call sign 'Bob' – in *Top Gun: Maverick*, and, of course, for being Bill's son. Some actors would prickle at being thought of as an 'everyman', but not Pullman. 'I take that as a compliment. It means a lot. To me, it means someone who's relatable.'

Another key role is Susan Norton, an avid reader who longs to leave town in search of brighter lights in a bigger city. The part went to Makenzie Leigh (*The Assistant*, *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*). 'I kind of feel like I was playing a version of myself,' she laughs. 'It's the worst thing an actor can say. It should be, "Oh, I *crafted* something so…", but the sense of humour appealed to me, and I totally love that period.' Leigh grew up in Texas. Like Susan, she was itching to spread her wings. 'I wanted to get to New York, for sure. I graduated from high school and bought a plane ticket. I grew up in a big town, but not big enough for me!'

Though Dauberman's film is naturally forced to prune narrative strands and jettison characters – the book, which followed King's slimline debut *Carrie*, is the first indication of the author's penchant to pen doorstops – it beautifully captures the small-town flavours that King so excels at, and is colourfully cast. In support there's Bill Camp (*Presumed Innocent*, *12 Years a Slave*) as school teacher Matthew Burke, who fulfils the Van

Susan (Makenzie Leigh), Ben (Lewis Pullman), Dr Cody (Alfre Woodard), Mark (Jordan Preston Carter) and Father Callahan (John Benjamin Hickey) unwisely wait for sundown

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

An undead resident has one thing on their mind

The new adaptation recreates an iconic scene from the book

Helsing role; Alfre Woodard (*The Core*, *Annabelle*) as medical practitioner Dr Cody; Jordan Preston Carter as Mark Petrie, a kid who first takes the fight to his bullies, then vampires; and John Benjamin Hickey (*Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, *Flags of Our Fathers*) as Father Callahan, an alcoholic priest with a broken faith whose crucifix is no threat to Barlow.

NIGHT FLIERS

Talking of crucifixes, *Salem's Lot* comes up with a neat twist on vampire lore, with thrust-out crosses flinging the neck-nippers across the room and affixing them to walls with limbs flailing, like pinned bugs. It's a cool, cinematic flourish, though one that Dauberman was at first unsure about, desiring it to be incorporated for concrete reasons.

'I wrestled with this a lot,' he admits. 'I wanted to try and find a different approach than what we've seen a thousand times before in vampire movies. How can I visually represent the power of the crucifix beyond just the snarling, recoiling, slowly-backing-up vampire? Conversely, how can I show the power of Barlow and the lack of faith when he's confronted with a crucifix? It all started from there…'

As for Pullman and Leigh, they were in no doubt that it was flipping awesome. 'I did a lot of stunts,' smiles Pullman. 'It's probably the biggest action movie I've been a part of. I know I was in *Top Gun*, but we were in planes. This is the most physical action I've had the opportunity to do. It's high-octane. There's some parkour happening here. I got to check something off my bucket list: a *Starsky & Hutch* butt-flight over the hood of the car. There was one time I fully cleared and my butt cheeks didn't even touch the hood. That was a prize moment.'

'I'd never done stunts before,' says Leigh. 'I came out of acting school like [puts on highfalutin voice], "I'm going to play the lead dramatic characters," and I got on the set for this and I was like, "Oh my God, I want to be an action star." I did some choreography, and then your body just takes a wreck. I'd always assumed stunts were just stunts, but you're actually doing them – you're getting thrown up against a wall, you just add a little padding. I'd get to the end of the day and think, "How the fuck is Tom Cruise doing this?"'

Father Callahan's beliefs are put to the test

Crucially, there's weight to these scenes. Far from being CGI high jinks, they feel forceful and real, solidifying the threat of the vampires. Leigh and Pullman point to *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries* and the like, and attest that part of the appeal of *Salem's Lot* was seeing creatures of the night made scary and loathsome once more. There are haunting shots of vampires standing on dark rooftops of once warmly lit homes, indicating that the human life within has been extinguished. These foul figures scour the town for threat or prey.

'It wasn't about reclaiming anything,' Dauberman says when asked if he saw his movie as a riposte to romantic, tween-friendly bloodsuckers. 'It's always cool to see different interpretations of vampires. That said, I hadn't seen a more traditional vampire movie in a long while so I thought maybe one was due…'

Due it was, and overly so after the long delays. But now, finally, *Salem's Lot* has been resurrected to walk among us. It's a fun-yet-sincere midnight movie that you can well imagine lighting up the huge drive-in screen which features in the film, and it likewise pushed back the darkness that threatened to engulf it.

Now feed, and be satiated.

SALEM'S LOT OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 11 OCTOBER.

FIT FOR

ALAMY, GETTY

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

A KING

EVER SINCE CARRIE SPILT FIRST BLOOD IN 1976, STEPHEN KING ADAPTATIONS HAVE BEEN A BIG-SCREEN STAPLE. BUT WHAT ARE THE SHINING LIGHTS AND WHICH ARE A TOTAL MISERY? THE *TOTAL FILM* TEAM PUTS KING'S CINEMATIC OEUVRE UNDER EXAMINATION TO PICK THE 10 BEST – AND FIVE WORST.

WORDS MARTYN CONTERIO, JORDAN FARLEY, JAMIE GRAHAM, LEILA LATIF, MATT MAYTUM, NEIL SMITH

Shakespeare may have the edge overall, but there is no living author whose work has been more thoroughly adapted than that of horror Maine-stay Stephen King. His cinema-friendly blend of innovative high concepts, rich characters and shocks that stick in the memory has resulted in more than 50 feature adaptations of his work, with Mike Flanagan's *The Life of Chuck*, Osgood Perkins' *The Monkey*, Francis Lawrence's *The Long Walk* and Gary Dauberman's *Salem's Lot* (see p58) on the foreboding horizon.

The question then is: which are the best? The King crown jewels, if you will. The rules are simple: only feature films are under consideration (including anthologies), they must be based on written work by King, or have a King screenplay credit (no films in which he only cameos) and… that's it! They can't all be gems though, so we're also rounding up the five films to avoid, or watch if you *really* want a fright. So without further ado, let's count down. And long live the King…

10 | IT
2017-19

'What do you mean, I look nothing like Tim Curry?'

Stephen King didn't set out expressly to be a horror writer. But when *Carrie* hit big and he followed it with *Salem's Lot* and *The Shining*, he accepted – happily, it should be said – that he was pigeon-holed. *It*, published after a slew of other horror books, was his magnum opus: '*It* will be my final exam,' he said, bringing together all that he knew and desired to say on the genre.

Andy Muschietti's film, divided into two chapters, does a handsome job of replicating the great warmth and character detail of the doorstep novel, set in Derry, Maine as a band of misfit kids fight a shapeshifting evil whose resting bitchface is Pennywise the Dancing Clown (Bill Skarsgård). Our heroes then return 27 years later to finish the job. 'You don't want them to be spam in a can… you want them to live and to win,' said King of his rich characters. 'And that translates to the film. I really like this movie.' The 1990 made-for-TV adap starring Tim Curry and a wobbly spider has its fans, but this is a monster leap forward.

BEST BIT The first film is superior but Pennywise smashes *Chapter Two*'s hall of mirrors scene. **JG**

9 | DOCTOR SLEEP (DIRECTOR'S CUT)
2019

Ewan McGregor as the now-grown-up Danny

Met with tepid reviews, Mike Flanagan's take on King's belated sequel to *The Shining* has since grown in reputation. The Director's Cut in particular helped, an added half-hour allowing Flanagan to do his thing of concentrating on characters and relationships (just look at his exemplary long-form Netflix shows *The Haunting of Hill House* and *Midnight Mass*).

Flanagan's adap of *Doctor Sleep* miraculously melds the very different worlds (and worldviews) of King and Kubrick, for much as the author famously hated the filmmaker's take on his 1977 novel ('a great big beautiful Cadillac with no motor inside'), any viewer hearing the words '*Shining* sequel' will think of Jack Nicholson tramping the Overlook Hotel. So we get King's story, published in 2013, of an adult Dan Torrance (Ewan McGregor) protecting young psychic Abra Stone (Kyliegh Curran) from Rose the Hat (Rebecca Ferguson) and her travelling cult The True Knot, but we also revisit the Overlook, and old ghosts, for strong narrative reasons.

It's rare to see horror movies of this scale, and rarer still to be favoured with such heart and nuance between genuinely nasty shocks.

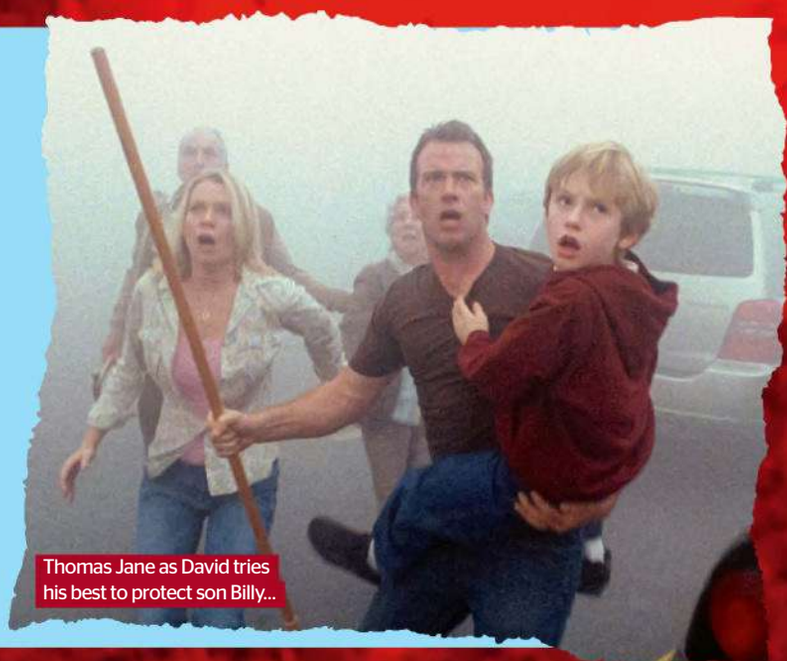
BEST BIT Dan steps inside the hulking Overlook. All of *The Shining*'s iconic sets were recreated in painstaking detail. **JG**

8 | THE MIST
2007

The third in an otherwise unconnected trifecta of King adaptations hailing from writer/director Frank Darabont (following *The Shawshank Redemption* and *The Green Mile*), *The Mist* might be the most unsettling horror of the last 20 years. The inter-dimensional eldritch abominations are bad enough – we wouldn't hesitate to *Eternal Sunshine* the skull-faced Grey Widowers from our memories – but its true terrors are terrestrial. 'It's *Lord of the Flies* that happens to have some cool monsters in it,' Darabont said at the time. 'How primitive do people get?' Very, it turns out, as religious fundamentalist Mrs. Carmody (a brilliantly loathsome Marcia Gay Harden) weaponises fear to build her following, making the inside of the besieged supermarket as dangerous as the certain death they face outside.

Famously, Darabont changed (and improved) the ambiguous finale of King's novella, replacing a slim shot at survival with the horrifying certainty of a handgun with four bullets. 'The ending is such a jolt – wham! It's frightening,' said King. Darabont hasn't made a film in the 17 years since. If it proves to be his swansong, it's one hell of a final act.

BEST BIT The hauntingly scored sight of the towering Behemoth stepping out of the mist inspires an unforgettable mix of majesty and despair. **JF**



Thomas Jane as David tries his best to protect son Billy…

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

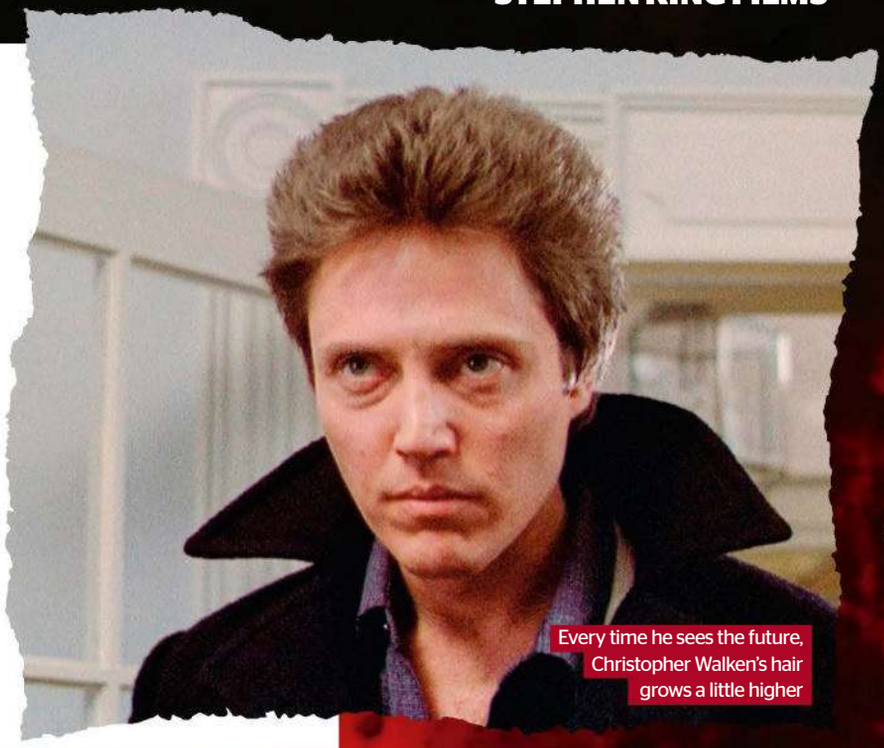
7 THE DEAD ZONE
1983

The story of schoolteacher Johnny Smith (Christopher Walken) waking up from a five-year coma possessing psychic abilities, *The Dead Zone* fit Canadian body horror auteur David Cronenberg like a surgical glove. The sci-fi elements and bodily/mental transformation themes importantly maintain crucial threads to the unique brand of genre cinema which made him notorious and earned him the nicknames 'Dave Deprave' and 'the Baron of Blood'.

Presenting the wintry tale in episodic structure – Johnny quickly learning about his unwanted gift, helping local cops foil a serial killer, stopping Martin Sheen's wannabe state senator from becoming US president and one day blowing up the world – Cronenberg, ever the economic storyteller, was able to tightly focus in on the film as a character study about acute loneliness (an ordinary bloke who went to sleep and woke up a medical curiosity, a freak of nature).

Walken's doomed protagonist is eerie and tightly wound, but equally full of humanity and warmth, while Martin Sheen threatens to steal the show in a villainous role as Greg Stillson, a bullying populist desperately seeking election to the US Senate.

BEST BIT Johnny's vision of future President Stillson commencing WW3 (because God told him to), declaring: 'The missiles are flying. Hallelujah, Hallelujah!' **MC**



Every time he sees the future, Christopher Walken's hair grows a little higher

Kathy Bates as the super-fan every author dreads

6 MISERY
1990

Stephen King enthusiasts know that much of his work can be neatly cleaved into two categories: 'telling on yourself' (*The Shining*, *The Stand*, *The Tommyknockers*) or 'a really messed-up idea I had' (*Carrie*, *Cujo*, *Survivor Type*). *Misery* is perhaps the ultimate fusion of the two. Not only is there a clear proxy for King as Paul Sheldon (James Caan) – a famous writer who fears he's a hack – is kidnapped by Annie Wilkes (Kathy Bates), a disturbed super-fan, but the newly sober King also leans into his most twisted instincts.

In the film, Paul is hobbled when Annie places a wooden block between his ankles and hammers his feet inwards. In the book, amputations and a blowtorch come into play, but director Rob Reiner knew less was more in this case, with Bates' Oscar-winning turn to sell it. Unlike with *some* of King's adaptations, the author embraced this deviation from the text, labelling the film 'great' in a 2014 interview. Regardless of the method of brutality, in both there is a devastating conclusion: this troubled writer will never truly escape the horrors of his past.

BEST BIT Annie douses Paul and his latest manuscript in lighter fluid and calmly asks him to choose which will be set alight. **LL**

5 CHRISTINE
1983

Christine, a 1958 red Plymouth Fury, is a vampiric seductress on four wheels, a femme fatale in chrome. She gobbles up men and spits them out (almost literally in the film's opening sequence). Tapping into youth culture and the automobile as a symbol of freedom, John Carpenter brought King's pulpy material to stylish cinematic life (those lens flare shots!). Sure, it might not be as scary or intense as, say, *Halloween* (1978) or *The Fog* (1980), but in its place is a gripping sense of tragedy (a total innocent corrupted by absolute evil), which afforded the cult helmer the opportunity to craft something a bit different.

Keith Gordon is fantastic playing both incarnations of Arnie Cunningham. Over his captivating bewitchment – from chess-club dweeb to rebel without a clue – the actor effectively plays Renfield to Christine's Count Dracula, bringing an operatic flavour to proceedings. You always care about the kid and his predicament, even when he's being cocky and surly to just about everybody around him. Poor Arnie, all he wanted was a sweet ride at a bargain price. Unfortunately, it proved a devil's bargain.

BEST BIT The spine-tingling 'OK, show me' scene, in which the wrecked Christine supernaturally rejuvenates to pristine condition right before Arnie's eyes. **MC**

Keith Gordon plays the teenage driver who gets more car than he bargained for

4 THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION
1994

Writer/director and King-adapter-extraordinaire Frank Darabont channelled both Capra and Scorsese when creating his own giant of American cinema. Reworking the author's *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* novella, the prison drama has none of the supernatural elements that typify much of King's best-known work. That's not to say there aren't horrors to be found in the fictional Maine institution (justice-system failings, the cruelty of some inmates and wardens, the absence of freedom), but what endures is the friendship between wrongly incarcerated Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins) and Red (Morgan Freeman), and the hope that sets the former free. Andy's sentenced for the murder of his wife and her lover; Red, by his own admission, is the 'only guilty man in Shawshank'. Much as it's a celebration of the human spirit, *Shawshank* is also a paean to the escapist power of movies, from the thrill of the *Gilda* screening to the Rita Hayworth poster that masks Andy's getaway route. When the 20-year span of the story closes with a reunion in Zihuatanejo, Mexico, it's a fitting climax to an all-timer bromance.

BEST BIT There are plenty to choose from, but Red's no-nonsense final parole interview pips it for sheer air-punching satisfaction. 'Approved' indeed. **MM**

Morgan Freeman and Tim Robbins as prisoners surviving the system

From prom queen to scream queen: Sissy Spacek as the original Carrie

3 CARRIE
1976

Stephen King's debut novel became the first of the 50+ movies based on his work, and few subsequent adaptations can touch it. Indeed, 'much better than the book' was King's verdict on Brian De Palma's picture, which grounded its bravado-and-brio formal brilliance with a heartrending performance from Sissy Spacek as the bullied teen who's drenched in humiliation at the prom, only to wreak terrible vengeance through her telekinetic powers.

Spacek rubbed Vaseline in her hair at the audition and slept in her bloody prom dress for three nights during filming to ensure continuity, but it was nothing to the torment that Carrie faces from fellow students Chrissie and Billy (Nancy Allen, John Travolta), or from the Oscar-nominated Piper Laurie as her fanatically religious mother. There have been two poor remakes and a sequel since, but the original *Carrie* is the one with the cultural footprint, its hand-from-grave jump scare responsible for the grisly shock codas of a thousand horror movies, and its star-spangled decorations informing the decor of pretty much every prom since, in movies and in life.

BEST BIT 'They're all gonna laugh at you...' The bucket of pig's blood soaks our heroine and sets off a chain of carnage. **JG**

2 STAND BY ME
1986

'We showed the film to Stephen King alone in a screening room and... he was pretty broken up,' recalls director Rob Reiner. 'He said, "That's the best film ever made out of something I've written."'

Based on the novella *The Body* from King's 1982 collection *Different Seasons* (which also housed *Shawshank Redemption* and *Apt Pupil*), *Stand by Me* is King's most autobiographical work. The device of four kids trekking 30 miles of Oregon train track to view a dead body is made up, but their escapades en route are plucked from his own childhood: encounters with thundering trains, slimy leeches, older bullies and more. In fact, Gordie (Wil Wheaton), the wannabe writer, is a version of King himself at that age, while he really did have a best pal who encouraged him and then died young, like Chris (River Phoenix, whose own premature death adds pathos).

A masterly coming-of-age story, *Stand by Me* is meditative and melancholy beneath its zinging lingo, riotous set-pieces and scenic, sun-soaked locations. Does any other movie so capture loneliness while celebrating friendship?

BEST BIT While Teddy and Vern (Corey Feldman, Jerry O'Connell) sleep by a campfire, Chris tells Gordie about stealing the milk money at school. **JG**

River Phoenix, Wil Wheaton and Corey Feldman on a childhood odyssey

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

1 THE SHINING
1980

Stephen King famously loathes *The Shining*, and he wasn't the only one: initial reviews were negative ('a reductive adaption,' wrote *The New Yorker*'s Pauline Kael; 'lacking in horror,' said Vincent Canby of *The New York Times*), and Stanley Kubrick was nominated for Worst Director at the Razzies. 'A piece of machinery with neither heart nor soul,' opined King, who'd written a personal novel about an alcoholic writer trying to tamp down his demons and be a good father. What Kubrick delivered was Jack Nicholson grinning inanely right off the bat (and axe), and an experience that many found slow, clinical and emotionally detached.

Now, of course, *The Shining* regularly tops Greatest Horror Movies Ever Made lists, judged not as an adaptation but its own masterful thing. It's a ghost story like no other, its scares emanating from brightly lit corridors and rooms as Jack (Nicholson), his wife Wendy (Shelley Duvall) and their young psychic son Danny (Danny Lloyd) spend a winter in the Overlook Hotel, where madness descends with the snow.

The Shining shot for more than a year, with Kubrick at times subjecting his actors to 100-plus takes. What he captured was pure dread. It's a film built on stillness and steadi(cam)ness and yet it thrums with insidious evil, its every frame packed with meaning and malevolence. As viewers, we're drawn back again and again until it's a part of us, and us of it. As Grady says, 'You've always been the caretaker.'

BEST BIT The gushing elevator blood? The twins? Jack axing the door? The woman in Room 237? Hmmm, let's go for Jack drawn to the Gold Room by the playing of *Midnight, the Stars and You*. Grady, tending bar, awaits... **JG**

OK, you know you want us to say it... 'HEEEEERE'S JOHNNY!'

Danny Lloyd and Shelley Duvall as the victims of the menacing Overlook – and Jack

FIVE KING STINKERS THEY CAN'T ALL BE CARRIE...

MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE
1986

That King directed this scrappy adaptation of his short story *Trucks* himself (with, it's rumoured, some help from George A. Romero) adds another layer of ignominy to this hammy horror about machines coming to life and terrorising a town. 'I was coked out of my mind,' he would later confess.

THE LAWNMOWER MAN
1992

Pygmalion meets *Tron* in this in-name-only retooling of another King story, which sees a suave mad scientist (a pre-Bond Pierce Brosnan) use drugs and VR to turn simpleton gardener Jeff Fahey into a psychokinetic superbrain. King was so unimpressed he sued to have his name taken off Brett Leonard's film.

DREAMCATCHER
2003

Castle Rock's impressive run of classy King adaptations came to a sorry end with this alien invasion yarn, a critically lambasted box-office flop he'd later call 'a train wreck'. Hard to see what Lawrence Kasdan saw in a film whose parasitical ETs enter the fray via a dead dude's anus.

THE DARK TOWER
2017

You'd need a dozen lawnmower men to work out how the beloved cycle of genre-splicing novels ended up generating such a flatly uninvolving farrago as Nikolaj Arcel's baffling sci-fi plodder. 'I thought to myself, "Well, people are going to be really puzzled by this,"' admitted King. 'And they were.'

CHILDREN OF THE CORN
2020

The 11th film to be inspired by King's short story about creepy kids sacrificing adults to a cornfield demon reveals said entity to be a husky monster with a distinct whiff of Groot. That's pretty much all that distinguishes a prequel that is ineptly plotted, scare-free and generally shucking terrible. **NS**

INTERVIEW **JAMES MOTTRAM**

‘NOW NOTHING IS ABOUT LOOKS OR ABOUT BEING A LEADING LADY. AND IT’S VERY LIBERATING’

EMILY WATSON

Since breaking hearts in *Breaking the Waves*, Emily Watson has delivered countless screen masterclasses, from *Gosford Park* and *Punch-Drunk Love* to *Apple Tree Yard*. Now, the English star goes toe-to-toe with Cillian Murphy in Irish drama *Small Things like These* and fronts TV prequel *Dune: Prophecy*. Is it her second coming? It’s elementary, my dear Watson...

PORTRAIT **DAVID LEVENE**

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

DAVID LEVENE/GUARDIAN/EYEVINE

'I've been in short-bite mode,' announces Emily Watson, sitting opposite *Total Film* on a comfy sofa in London's Corinthia Hotel. Dressed in loose-fitting black slacks and a white blouse with a giant poppy print, she's been talking up *Small Things like These*, the delicate new drama based on Claire Keegan's novel. A day of doing short sound bites to camera isn't ideally suited to Watson, a highly astute actress whose nigh-on three-decade career has seen her work with such mavericks as Charlie Kaufman, Paul Thomas Anderson and Robert Altman.

Ever since Watson broke through as Bess, the troubled woman in Lars von Trier's 1996 drama *Breaking the Waves*, the die was cast. Winning her a first Oscar nomination for Best Actress (her second came just two years later, for cellist Jacqueline du Pré in *Hilary and Jackie*), Watson was suddenly thrust into the orbit of some of cinema's greatest talents. 'Things were coming in,' she reflects. '[I just thought] "Oh, that smells right." I just followed my nose.'

That nose of hers led Watson to working with the likes of Daniel Day-Lewis (*The Boxer*), Adam Sandler (*Punch-Drunk Love*), Christian Bale (*Equilibrium*) and Ralph Fiennes (*Red Dragon*) in the late 90s and early 2000s. While she's never been a conventional leading lady, she's arguably much more chameleon-like, going from, say, head housemaid in Altman's English country-house murder mystery *Gosford Park* to the actor Tammy in Kaufman's 'bonkers' meta-work *Synecdoche, New York*.

Raised in London – her father was an architect, her mother an English teacher – her Anglican upbringing was a sheltered one, her only escape being literature. 'My mother was a great lover of literature. So we just had a lot of books in the house, and I read and I read and I read,' she says. After studying English at Bristol University, and training at the Drama Studio London, she found a home at the Royal Shakespeare Company before she broke with *Breaking the Waves*.

If the 2000s saw Watson take a step back for motherhood (she now has a teenage son and a daughter with her husband Jack Waters, a former actor who she met at the RSC), she still saw the likes of Steven Spielberg (*War Horse*) come calling, alongside shows like *Apple Tree Yard* and *Chernobyl*. Now, however, it feels like her time again, with the 57-year-old back with a vengeance. Upcoming major roles include TV prequel *Dune: Prophecy*, animation *The Legend of Ochi*, and *Hamnet*, the new film from *Nomadland's* Chloé Zhao.

Before this, she stars opposite Cillian Murphy in *Small Things like These*. A film that touches on the controversial Magdalene Laundries run by the Catholic Church, which brutally exploited young women, Watson plays Sister Mary, the no-nonsense head of the convent in a small Irish town in the mid-1980s. Her confrontation with Murphy's coal merchant, whose interior life is thrown in turmoil when he encounters one such victim, may be one of the best-acted scenes you'll see on screen this year…

Emily Watson makes her screen debut alongside Stellan Skarsgård in 1996's *Breaking the Waves*

ALAMY, LIONSGATE

What was the big attraction of *Small Things Like These*?
I read the screenplay and my agent said, 'This is probably too small, but you should take a look.' And I went, 'This is going to be amazing. And I want to be there just to have a chance to have a crack at that scene.' It's the most brilliant piece of writing, because there's so much going on and so much there. And yet they don't really talk, nothing is really said.

How do you prepare for something like that?
You just have to be very, very ready. I had to make sure that I had thought through every detail of every thought, really, and be very on top of the dialogue… so it just becomes innate, it's not something you have to reach for in any way, so that you can really play and really explore things. Just raising the pitch of your voice totally changes the dynamic, because it's all about a power dynamic that's unspoken between the two of them, and she has only to mention something very briefly, and in passing, for him to have a total understanding that his existence is under threat, his family is in jeopardy. It's subtle and powerful.

The Magdalene Laundries is something that came to the fore partly through Peter Mullan's film, *The Magdalene Sisters*. What emotions did this horrifying phenomenon bring up?
The courage, in a way, of people like Sinéad O'Connor. Everybody thought she was mad, standing up and ripping up a picture of the Pope. But now we know what we know. And you just think, 'Well, [that's] the most unholy, un-Christian thing you could possibly cook up.'

Of course, your scene with Cillian's character doesn't address any of that on the surface…
It's about cups of tea and slices of cake, which is why it's such a great piece of writing. I mean, it's not on-the-nose writing in any way, shape or form. And it's also a film about a man who can't articulate what's happening to him. It's not like he's decided to do something. It's almost as if, in his childhood, he has

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

Watson exhibits a quiet menace as Sister Mary in *Small Things Like These*

unresolved grief and the loss of his mother, but he also had a life that he had because of an act of true charity, when somebody took his mother in, and she was able to raise him, and they had a proper relationship.

So that's why he exists, and why he is the man he is. And then for him to stumble across someone who is having that wrenched away… it starts a vibration in him that he can't stop, in a way. That's how I see it.

How did you interpret your character?
She's like a Mafia boss! I think when a whole community is in fear of you, you have very little to do to make people… it's just a mild stirring of the pot, but it's kind of terrifying. I think that's how religion works. A lot of the time it's through fear. And it's how people become complicit in their own subjugation. Through fear.

Yours was an Anglican upbringing, is that right?
I grew up in, yes, a strangely uncomfortable religious situation. Not Catholic, but similarly very oppressive to young women.

'I JUST WASN'T A VERY GOOD ACTOR. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT IT WAS'

Even your debut *Breaking the Waves* dealt with something similar…
Yes, a religious community that is very controlling and condemning. I'm drawn to material that touches me in a visceral way. This kind of story just makes me unbelievably angry on behalf of those kids and the babies who were pretty much just sold on.

What was it like to work with Cillian?
I haven't known Cillian for very long. I met him on this film and we've worked again together subsequently. But the fact that he's riding the wave of *Oppenheimer* and Oscars and all of that…this is where he's shining a light. He wants to work in this kind of way and he's built a family around him – collaborators – who he loves and trusts. It feels quite privileged to have been snuck in there.

What was the other project you did with him?
We've just wrapped on *Steve*, which is an adaptation of *Shy*, the book by Max Porter, who wrote *Grief is the Thing with Feathers*. And this is another of his works, and it's about a day in the life of a school for excluded boys in England, in the West Country, in the 90s.

Going back to the beginning of your career, you got rejected from drama school, right?
I was young, finding my way. All of them turned me down. I just wasn't a very good actor. I didn't know what it was. I had no real notion of what acting was. I was going through the motions, thinking, 'This sounds quite good.' I was complete hit-and-miss. I know I probably had something because people responded to me, but I had no idea what it was, or how to shape it. Been a very long journey from there.

Your breakthrough role in *Breaking the Waves* was a real departure for Lars von Trier, who'd previously made very stylistically controlled films like *Europa*…
He, I think, decided to change everything about everything he did and how he did it, when he made this film. *Europa* was a very carefully constructed piece of work. If you could find something in the film that wasn't on the storyboard, he'd give you a bottle of whisky. It was very, very

controlled. He just put a bomb under all of it, and went, 'No, this is going to have a stream of anarchy running through it, and I'm just going to throw everything in the air and do this differently.'

Ending up with your first Oscar nomination from that must have been a bizarre whirlwind for you?
Believe me, it really was. It really, really was. When you've never experienced anything like that, you're just going, 'Oh yeah, OK, oh OK, OK!' And then suddenly, 18 months have gone by, and you're going, 'What just happened?'

Soon after on *The Boxer*, you got to work with Daniel Day-Lewis. What was that like?
What he brings to the screen is unlike anybody else. He really is extraordinary. I found it all a bit overwhelming. He and Jim [Sheridan, director]… they had reached a point where there was soon to be a parting of the ways, I think. And I think our film might have been… they just were kind of outgrowing each other. I don't really know, I wasn't party to it, but it wasn't settled. But it's a great movie. He has a really great voice in the telling of that particular corner of the world, I think.

Could you ever envisage stepping away from work in the way Day-Lewis did?
Yes and no. I can see myself not working as much, maybe at some point. But I love it, and it's what keeps me alive. It keeps me interested and stimulated and it keeps me investigating life, investigating people, which is what I love. That's the juice of it.

Did working with Day-Lewis inspire you for your extensive prep on *Hilary and Jackie*?
I think so. He's the gold standard of prep. I just knew I couldn't begin to play that part without the prep. It was the axiomatic part of taking on the job, doing that. There was no way that I could have done it in any other way.

What training did you go through?
I had a cello teacher, and they booked me a little rehearsal room in Marylebone Lane. And I did lot of cello lessons, learning to mime those pieces with a soaped bow. I learnt all the fingering, I learnt all the bowing, and I played along to the playback. So I got very, very familiar with it in a way that you would learn a script in an interpretive way. And I had a movement teacher to help me, because it was so very particular, the way that she played the cello. But also then with multiple sclerosis and all that… it was a lot.

FIVE STAR TURNS

BREAKING THE WAVES 1996
Watson was cast in her debut feature after Helena Bonham Carter dropped out at the last minute. Bonham Carter's loss, as Lars von Trier's psychosexual melodrama about a religious woman's obsessive love for her husband was a career-launching hit.

HILARY AND JACKIE 1998
For her performance as real-life cello virtuoso Jacqueline du Pré, Watson picked up a second Best Actress nomination at the Academy Awards. 'She radiates a wanton erotic wilfulness that at moments borders on madness,' said *The New York Times*.

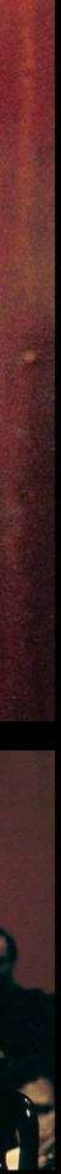
GOSFORD PARK 2001
In Robert Altman's all-star whodunnit, Watson is a foul-mouthed treat as head housemaid Elsie who has an illicit connection to the victim and no love for the 'toffs' upstairs.

PUNCH-DRUNK LOVE 2002
Though Adam Sandler soaked up the lion's share of the plaudits, Watson is magnetic in PTA's unconventional romance. As with Sandler, PTA wrote the role for Watson.

CHERNOBYL 2019
While Legasov and Shcherbina navigate murky Soviet politics, Watson's morally upstanding nuclear physicist Ulana Khomyuk advocates for the truth after uncovering the cause of Chernobyl's nuclear meltdown. JF

ALAMY

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS



***Gosford Park* must also have been a real moment for you…**
That's one of my great touchstones in my career, simply because of the cast and Robert Altman. He was just so inspiring. He'd say, 'No, we don't do it like that. We do it like this. We create an ensemble, a family.' And so many people that I've subsequently worked with, like Paul [Thomas Anderson], went, 'That's how I want to be, that's how I want to make movies. That's how I want to be interested in the humanity of it.' He was a great trendsetter, and just a gorgeous guy.

Are you always surprised when you're approached by the public, what films they've seen of yours?
Yes. A lot of young people now have watched [Anderson's] *Punch-Drunk Love*. It has a very alt following. Maybe it's Adam [Sandler]… it's kind of stood the test of time. It's got a real quirk to it that people love, I think.

What it was like to work with Paul Thomas Anderson?
He was fantastic. It was so intense and so much fun. Making that movie was really like a wild ride. It really was fabulous. He did so many things in a different kind of a way. It was very personal. The way he chose the colour of the props was personal and everything was incredibly felt and visceral. And I don't know… nothing was routine, nothing was normal. It was really insane and brilliant.

> *'I WENT IN VERY MUCH ON A CHARACTER-ACTOR TICKET, PLAYING BLIND'*

What about when you did *Red Dragon*? You played the blind woman…
I went to the Royal National Institute Of Blind People. They ran a course for people who were going to be working with blind people, for sighted people, so you could spend time experiencing what it was like to be blind. So it was a series of lectures and talks by people who were blind, and then they literally blindfolded us, and we had to get around the block, across the road. Pretty terrifying. But then I also met a woman who wasn't blind from birth, but she'd gone blind, and she talked to me a lot about what her life was like.

Were you nervous to take it on?
I wasn't. It's actually the only real, straight, full-on Hollywood movie I've done. So that was kind of a fun thing to just go there and do that. But I went in very much on a character-actor ticket, playing blind. It was possibly a bit of a slightly soulless [project]… but it was a great experience.

Moving on, one of the most arresting performances you gave recently was in mini-series *Apple Tree Yard*, an extremely provocative role. How did you find that experience?
It was great. I tell you what was lovely about that… I met the director [Jessica Hobbs] to read the script, and I kind of went, 'Ooh really? Do I want to go there?' I was about to turn 50 at the time, and then I went to meet the director, and she's now one of my very best friends. She was just somebody, you walk in the room and you look them in the eye and go, 'Oh, I see. We understand each other, and if we do this, we will tell this story from our point of view. We are both this age, and this is potentially our story, and how does that feel?'

I had a lovely group. I mean, Ben Chaplin, I've known for years, and is one of those people that you know is going to show up and do an incredible job and just be a laugh. It's like a safety net of proper actors that you surround yourself with in that situation. It was quite a departure.

In terms of prestige TV, you did *Appropriate Adult* before that. What drew you to it?
It was just a great piece of writing. Dominic West playing [serial killer] Fred West. It was a funny one because when my agent said, 'I'm sending you a script about Fred and Rosemary West,' I immediately thought, 'I don't want to do that.'

And then I read it, and actually it was very interesting. It didn't look at the crimes in any way. There was nothing in there that was graphic in any way. But it was a very interesting study of that kind of a character.

Did that make you want to do more TV?
When my children were smaller, I was just looking around for work that I could do that would keep me close to home. Not being able to go home on a weekend is impossible when you've got small children. So I just had to be quite canny about what I did, and how I set things up, because I gave myself a two-week rule. For a long time, I wasn't away for longer than two weeks.

Looking forward, it seems like you have an incredible roster of projects on the way…
It's bizarre, isn't it? It doesn't feel like I've been working more or less than usual, but the way everything's lined up… it's

EMILY WATSON IN NUMBERS

2
Academy Award nominations for Best Actress, for *Breaking the Waves* and *Hilary and Jackie*.

$410M
Global box office total of her highest-grossing film, *Kingsman: The Golden Circle*.

46
Feature film credits, including voice roles.

29
Years old when she starred in *Breaking the Waves*.

3
Films co-starring Philip Seymour Hoffman: *Punch-Drunk Love*, *Red Dragon* and *Synecdoche, New York*.

'IT'S A VERY INTERESTING PALETTE BECAUSE IT'S NOT CHILDISH... IT'S NOT LIKE STAR WARS'

great. I'll take that. Maybe I am a little bit over the hump of having to be… how can I put this? I just don't care! Now… nothing is about looks or about being a leading lady. There's none of that nonsense to contend with. And it's very liberating, actually.

Did you feel that pressure when you were younger?
When I was younger. I was never really in the full stream of it, because I've never been that kind of actor. You are aware of that stuff, but now I'm a good team leader. I'm experienced. I have a lot to bring and I have a lot of skills in how to create a good working environment and to make people feel like they belong and encouraged. Because for however many forms you fill out about workplace behaviour, actually putting in the care to make sure everybody's all right… when you're an actor leading a company, that's an important part of the job.

In terms of making sure everyone's safe?
It's not just safe. It's that you feel seen and you feel part of the family. With *Dune*, there have been a lot of young kids away from home for a long time, and that's not easy to navigate, necessarily. And just making sure there's a sense of company, and we're all looking out for each other… it's those kind of things.

***Dune: Prophecy* is set 10,000 years before the recent movies. What can you tell us?**
It's built around the Bene Gesserit order. That's the sisterhood. That's one of the central characters in it, and all the universes that they control, and their power… it's kind of fascinating. I play Valya Harkonnen.

Presumably she's not one of the good guys, judging by the Harkonnen family in the films?
They've evolved to quite an extreme version at this stage. [In our show] they're very recognisably human and complicated… a bit of a fucked-up family. But much less extreme.

Did you dive into the books?
A little bit. To be honest… there are parts of the lore of *Dune* that are very embedded in our story, but it's a springboard into some new territory. It was very exciting, but also very great to go into that world with the security of knowing I've got the skill set to make everything feel real. It's a very interesting palette because it's not childish… it's not like *Star Wars*. It has a moral complexity, which is interesting.

What can you tell us about *The Legend of Ochi*?
I hope – touch wood – that's going to be amazing. It's all animatronic creatures, and then masses and masses of VFX. And it's live action, but there are many, many elements to it that they have built, and then they're just a tiny little outfit doing it themselves. I mean, it was an amazing script, and it had a really electric feel around it. So sometimes those things don't work out. But I hold out hope that it might be rather good.

You're also working with Chloé Zhao, and actors Paul Mescal and Jessie Buckley, on *Hamnet*. How has that been for you?
I mean dreamland, it's just heaven. I can't tell you. I'm playing the mother of Shakespeare, and Shakespeare has been a massive part of my life and my family's life, and I'm playing Paul's mum again [after *God's Creatures*], and Jessie is playing Agnes, a part she was born to play. Chloé Zhao – she's like a witch doctor! She's just remarkable.

I think when they started putting this together, they said, 'We want a woman to direct it, who would be top of our wish list?' And they said, 'Well, Chloé Zhao, obviously.' And then they sent it to her and she said, 'Yeah!' It's absolutely her territory.

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

Watson's Ulana Khomyuk investigates the cause of the disaster in *Chernobyl*

You must have seen more women direct now?

God's Creatures was directed by two women. There is a very tangible change there… there's a moment of rupture. We were talking about this earlier, about someone like Sinéad O'Connor ripping up a picture of the Pope, and everyone thinks she's a lunatic. And then 10 years later, we're all going, 'Oh yeah, that's what that was about.' All those accusations came out, the #MeToo movement… but that has quite quickly translated into a reset, particularly in the industry I work in, about how people are treated and how women are treated and respected.

I remember negotiating a contract for *Chernobyl*, and my agent turned around and said, 'Is she getting the same as the men?' And there's a bit of silence, and they came back with a much, much better offer. I actually got quite upset. I was very shaken and moved by that moment in my life, because it hadn't occurred to me that I would ever get paid the same as them. And why would I? Because it's just the way it works. Men get paid more in film, right?

Presumably you'd never discussed pay with a male colleague?

No, you wouldn't, it's kind of rude and intrusive. But there are ways… actually one night over a drink in the bar [during *Chernobyl*] we went, 'Shall we all say it at the same time?' And we were all getting the same. And I feel absolutely, hugely grateful to have been just the right side of that wave, so that I'm feeling the benefit of it.

[On *Dune*] Olivia Williams is playing Tula, and we were whippersnappers together at the RSC… just going, 'Did we ever think that this would be how it ended up?' There was a stage back then, as an actress of a certain age, you kind of went, 'This is definitely going to wind down for me, that's going to be it' – and it hasn't at all. It's been the opposite. I can feel like I'm leading a company in a way that I wouldn't have been. Women my age are incredibly powerful, useful humans and sex doesn't really come into it that much. I mean, I guess it does in terms of the emotional realm, maybe. But, yeah, humanity is doing itself a favour.

SMALL THINGS LIKE THESE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 1 NOVEMBER.

EMILY WATSON LINE READING

'I LOVE YOU NO MATTER WHAT IS IN YOUR HEAD!'
BESS MCNEILL
BREAKING THE WAVES

'So, you bought all that pudding so that you could get frequent-flier miles?'
LENA LEONARD
PUNCH-DRUNK LOVE

'WHY DO WE SPEND OUR TIME LIVING THROUGH THEM?'
ELSIE
GOSFORD PARK

HBO/SKY, ALAMY

EDITED BY
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM_MATTL

★★★★★
NATTER THING WRONG WITH IT

★★★★★
HAS LOADS TO SAY

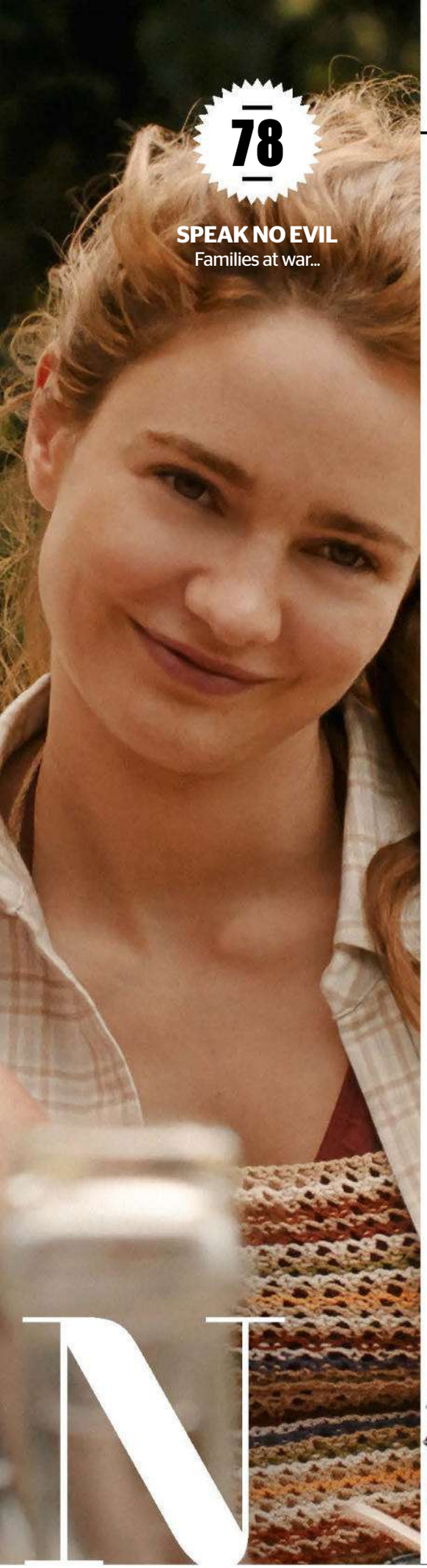
★★★★★
DELIVERS THE GOODS

★★★★★
NEEDS A PROPER TALKING-TO

★★★★★
UTTER RUBBISH

SCREE

THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED MOVIE



78

SPEAK NO EVIL
Families at war...

82

88

89

91

OUT NOW

Alien: Romulus	★★★	p91
And Mrs	★★	p91
Apollo 13: Survival	★★★★	p81
Black Dog	★★★	p86
Blink Twice	★★★★★	p90
The Crow	★★	p89
His Three Daughters	★★★	p80
It Ends with Us	★★★	p90
Justice League: Crisis on Infinite Earths Trilogy	★★	p90
Rob Peace	★★★	p86
Trap	★★★	p91

12 SEPTEMBER

Speak No Evil	★★★★	p78

13 SEPTEMBER

Boonie Bears: Time Twist	★★	p84
The Critic	★★	p81
In Camera	★★★★	p84
Lee	★★★	p88
My Favourite Cake	★★★★	p89
Reawakening	★★★	p84
Will & Harper	★★★★	p87

16 SEPTEMBER

The Vourdalak	★★★★	p90

20 SEPTEMBER

200% Wolf	★★★	p91
Cyborg: A Documentary	★★★	p81
Girls Will Be Girls	★★★★	p85
The Goldman Case	★★★★	p87
Strange Darling	★★★★	p85
The Substance	★★★★	p84
Sugarcane	★★★★	p81

23 SEPTEMBER

Greedy People	★★★★	p89

27 SEPTEMBER

Dragonkeeper	★★	p84
Hellboy: The Crooked Man	★★★	p88
Lore	★★★	p86
Megalopolis	★★	p81
My Old Ass	★★★★	p89
The Outrun	★★★★	p86
The Teacher	★★★	p91

30 SEPTEMBER

Azrael: Angel of Death	★★★	p86

4 OCTOBER

The Battle for Laikipia	★★★★	p89
A Different Man	★★★★★	p80
Joker: Folie à Deux	★★	p82
Portraits of Dangerous Women	★★	p90

ALSO RELEASED

We couldn't see them in time for this issue, so head to gamesradar.com/totalfilm for reviews of the following:

TITLE	RELEASE DATE
Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice	Out now
Never Let Go	27 September
Wolfs	20 September

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

EXTRAS

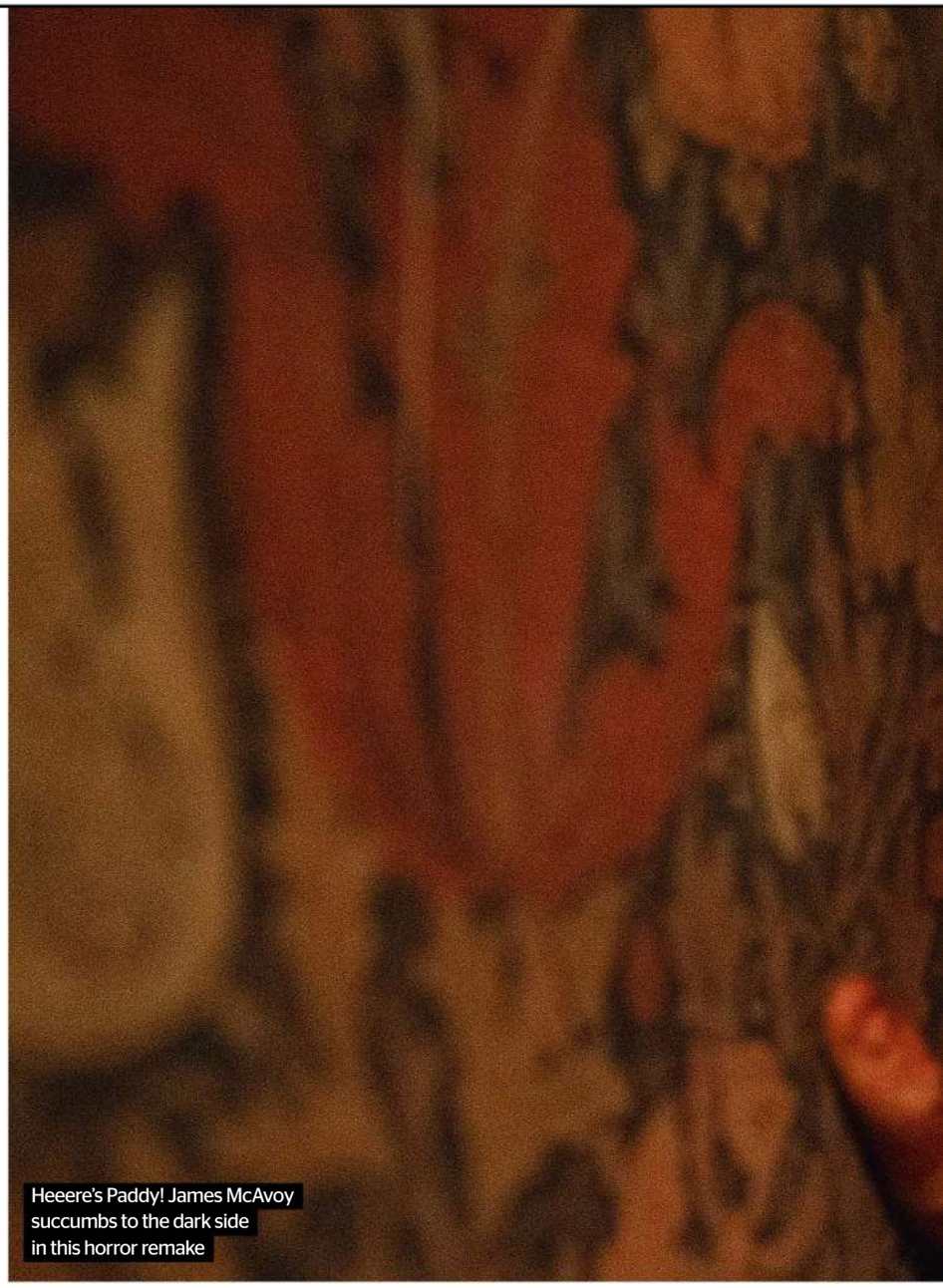
Archive/Blu-ray reviews	p92-94
TV, Soundtracks, Extras, Books	p95-98

REVIEWS

SPEAK NO EVIL 15

Not a sequel to *See No Evil, Hear No Evil...*

★★★★★ **OUT 12 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS



Heeere's Paddy! James McAvoy succumbs to the dark side in this horror remake

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

STRAW DOGS
1971
Peckinpah's classic is also a tale of soft-bellied Americans being terrorised by a coarse Brit.

ABIGAIL'S PARTY
1977
Mike Leigh's satire of manners has less blood, but is every bit as painful to watch.

MIDSOMMAR
2019
Both versions of *Speak No Evil* see prey being lured in. See also *The Wicker Man*, *Hostel*, et al.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

Stark and unsettling.' 'Depraved.' 'I never, ever want to see it again.' So read the reviews of Christian Tafdrup's Danish-Dutch production *Speak No Evil* (2022), a film so unflinching and unsparing it was immediately elevated (or should that be relegated?) to 'bleakest movies ever made' conversations alongside the likes of *Salò*, *Requiem for a Dream* and *Cannibal Holocaust*.

No English-language remake would ever have the cojones to match it, right? Tellingly, when it was announced that Blumhouse Productions would be cranking out a redo starring James McAvoy and Mackenzie Davis, the go-to comparison was the remake of George Sluizer's suffocating Dutch horror *The Vanishing* (1988). This film, labelled by Stanley Kubrick as the scariest he'd seen, ended on a crushing note of nihilism, only for the 1993 remake to flip the talking-point, WTF, no-dear-God climax – some feat given Sluizer himself was back in the director's chair.

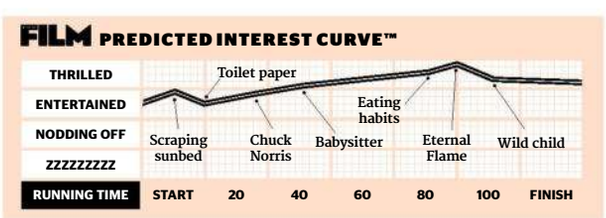
So, *Speak No Evil* 2024. Does it sanitise? Dilute? Bottle it? No spoilers here, but let's just say that what it does do is clever, walking a thin line between honouring the original, treading its own path to justify its existence and offering some choicely brutal surprises. Yes, brutal – the remake is, after all, written and directed by James Watkins, and anyone who's ever seen *Eden Lake* (2008) is not going to accuse him of wimping out.

The premise is much the same, only with the lion's share of the action transposed from the Netherlands countryside to a farmhouse in Devon. It starts sunnily enough in Tuscany, where milquetoast American couple Ben (Scoot McNairy) and Louise (Davis) are befriended on holiday by the more outgoing, mischievous Englishman Paddy (McAvoy) and his wife Ciara (Aisling Franciosi). Both couples have young children; Ben and Louise's daughter Agnes (Alix West Lefler) hits it off with Paddy and Ciara's Ant (Dan Hough), a shy lad with a congenital condition that makes it hard for him to communicate.

The holiday ends with Paddy insisting that their new US pals visit them in Devon, which duly happens – perhaps a 'digital detox' in rustic England is just what Ben and Louise need to firm up their strained marriage. Only something feels ever-so-slightly off. It starts when Paddy forgets that Louise is a vegetarian and serves up blood sausages on the first night, and even insists that she have the honour of eating the most succulent part of their farmyard goose Libbi, whom Paddy killed with his own two hands to mark their arrival. Louise, not wanting to cause a fuss, dutifully opens wide when Paddy proffers the 'yummy' titbit on the end of a fork...

Like the original movie, Watkins' film is, on one level at least, a pitch-black comedy of manners, with Ben

DIRECTOR James Watkins **STARRING** James McAvoy, Mackenzie Davis, Scoot McNairy, Aisling Franciosi, Alix West Lefler **SCREENPLAY** James Watkins **DISTRIBUTOR** Universal **RUNNING TIME** 110 minutes



UNIVERSAL

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

and Louise suffering a series of incrementally escalating indignities because they don't wish to offend: speak no evil and avoid awkwardness at all times. Murmuring to themselves in bed at night, they fret that it's perhaps they who are too pampered and airy-fairy; and that Paddy, a somewhat brash bon vivant, means only well, even if he at times oversteps boundaries.

The couples' methods of parenting certainly differ, and it's here that the flashpoints, initially just flickers, mainly come, as Paddy not only berates his own child but starts to instruct Agnes, too. But eventually the microaggressions intensify ('Don't put yourself down. That's my job,' he jests with a creepily infectious grin when wife Ciara actually gets a word in), until Paddy's toxicity is fully unmasked. 'Why are you doing this?' quivers Louise. 'Because you let us,' comes the chilling reply.

'It builds with great care, chiselling into cultural differences, gender disparities, relationship cracks and conflicting ideas of masculinity'

Speak No Evil is strongly acted throughout: McAvoy for one is a beast, retaining his physique from *Glass*, which proves perfect for this particular brand of alpha-male brute. It's also a film that builds with great care, chiselling into cultural differences, gender disparities, relationship cracks and conflicting ideas of masculinity to ensure that every cause and effect is believable.

And when the third act arrives, any deviation it might or might not take from the original makes perfect narrative sense, while also allowing for its own agenda to be fully mapped out. The best horror remakes are not afraid to push the source material in new directions – exhibit a) *The Thing*; exhibit b) *The Fly* – and while Watkins' movie is nowhere near the level of those masterpieces (few are), it's shrewd, engrossing and pleasingly nasty. Just don't expect to ever listen to The Bangles' *Eternal Flame* in quite the same way again… **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT A remake that doesn't cook the goose. Full of wince-worthy moments of the correct kind.

Ed feels like a new man in an off-kilter beaut of a film

A DIFFERENT MAN 15

Face exploration...

★★★★★ **OUT 4 OCTOBER** CINEMAS

Writer/director Aaron Schimberg (2018's *Chained for Life*) crafts one of the most original works you're likely to see this year, a meta-movie that cunningly examines issues surrounding beauty and artistic creation. Some distance removed from his MCU persona, Sebastian Stan plays Ed, a New Yorker living with neurofibromatosis. Yet when a doctor offers a miracle-drug treatment, Ed's life changes overnight: his facial tumours simply fall away, leaving him unrecognisable to all those that know him.

Instead of revealing he's been cured, Ed decides to take on a new identity, recasting his life in a new image. Even his neighbour Ingrid (Renate Reinsve), a budding playwright, has no idea that it's the same old Ed. But this is just the start of Schimberg's increasingly oddball venture, which mixes body horror with dark comedy, not least when Ingrid decides to turn Ed's story into an off-Broadway drama.

Stan, who bagged the Silver Bear for Best Leading Performance at the Berlin Film Festival, has surely never been better. Meanwhile, there's a terrifically assured turn from *Under the Skin/Chained for Life*'s Adam Pearson (who has neurofibromatosis in real life) as Oswald, who emerges as a rival to Ed. But the real star, arguably, is Schimberg's script, which feels like the love child of David Cronenberg and Charlie Kaufman. Fiercely inventive and utterly strange, *A Different Man* really is something else. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT A brilliant exploration of beauty, artistry and identity, driven by a wonderful Stan performance. Don't miss.

HIS THREE DAUGHTERS 15

Sister tract...

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS **20 SEPTEMBER** NETFLIX

Filmmaker Azazel Jacobs follows up 2020's *French Exit* with a slow-burn study of sibling rivalry, parental mortality and the ties that bind. The trio of sisters at the heart of this stagey drama arrive in the Bronx apartment of their dying father to watch over his final moments, their differences marked.

Kate (Carrie Coon) is a control freak nursing resentment for half-sister Rachel (Natasha Lyonne), a pot-smoking gambler who's cared for Dad throughout his illness and lives in the apartment. The mediator between the two is middle sis Christina (Elizabeth Olsen), who does yoga between the mismatched furniture. As the three discuss DNR orders and food prep, the true nature of their relationships comes into stark view.

Though initially brittle and difficult to fully engage with, this meditation on family dynamics and the pressures on women as caregivers warms up thanks largely to Lyonne's earthy presence. Showing up with a spliff, a sports jersey and a musical accent, she's immediately different, sympathetic and real in an environment of unspoken slights. The emotional resonance she conjures eventually extends to the other characters, with the film building to a moving moment that's all the better for being played with a whimsical touch.

There's solid support, too, from Jovan Adepo, whose turn as Rachel's no-BS boyfriend is instrumental in earning the film its satisfying wrap-up. **JANE CROWTHER**

THE VERDICT Get past the theatrical start and this chamber piece emerges as a stealth weepie, with Lyonne its MVP.

Sibling rivalries are unearthed in Azazel Jacobs' drama

UNIVERSAL, NETFLIX, ENTERTAINMENT FILM DISTRIBUTORS, LIONSGATE, TULL STORIES, DOGWOOF

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

MEGALOPOLIS TBC

One from the art...

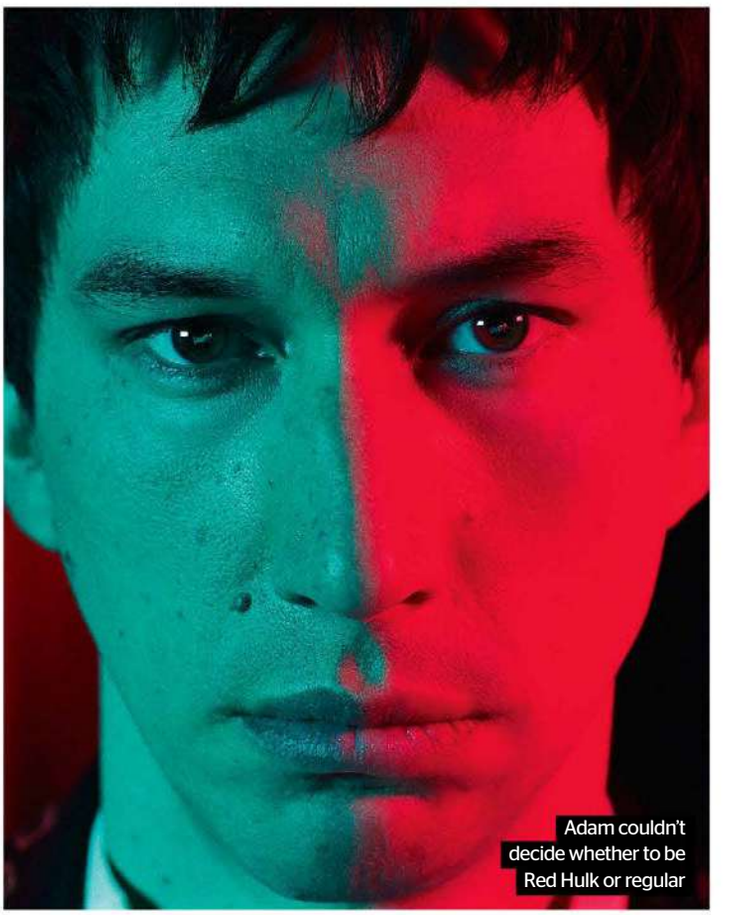
★★☆☆☆ **OUT 27 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

The phrase 'vanity project' seems fair when applied to Francis Ford Coppola's long-gestating, self-funded epic which, despite its (many) foibles, is not without entertainment value. From overblown sci-fi concepts to incest and erections, *Megalopolis* is a comedy of errors in a more literal sense than may have been intended, despite its Shakespeare references.

Adam Driver plays Cesar Catilina, an architect in a future inspired by ancient Rome. Cesar is hellbent on transforming the selfish city into a harmonious community with his somewhat baffling plans, to the annoyance of the mayor (Giancarlo Esposito). The mayor's daughter (Nathalie Emmanuel) falls in with Cesar after he falls out with his mistress, TV presenter Wow Platinum (Aubrey Plaza). Meanwhile, Shia LaBeouf and Jon Voight play characters with Trump-like qualities.

Lofty ideas and meta references to Coppola suggest this is a personal ode to his art. But it's hard to share his enthusiasm for this 40-years-in-the-making passion project when the dialogue is so mannered and each performance seems to come from a different movie. Chiefly about a frustrated male genius whose ambitions people don't always understand (hmm...), *Megalopolis* is often diverting, if viewed indulgently. The costumes and sets are enjoyably opulent, and some scenes will go down in movie history – mostly involving Plaza with a plunging neckline and a wicked glint in her eye. **ANNA SMITH**

THE VERDICT Almost so bad it's good, *Megalopolis* has its moments – as long as you don't take it too seriously.



Adam couldn't decide whether to be Red Hulk or regular

APOLLO 13: SURVIVAL PG

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** NETFLIX

Employing eye-popping NASA space footage and previously unseen archive material from Commander Jim Lovell, director Peter Middleton (*The Real Charlie Chaplin*) crafts a tense retelling of the near-disastrous 1970 Moon mission. Middleton's pairing of real audio with reconstructed footage (like a sweat-spangled NASA console, its gauges dropping terrifyingly) builds a sense of jeopardy, as Mission Control fights to bring the men home. Most moving of all are the Lovell family's home-movie memories of how they – and the world – held their breath. **KATE STABLES**

THE CRITIC 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 13 SEPTEMBER**

CINEMAS

London, the mid-1930s: acerbic, all-powerful and gay, critic Jimmy Erskine (Ian McKellen) risks losing his job under a new newspaper proprietor, who disapproves of his sexuality. Jimmy responds with a blackmail scheme that involves Gemma Arterton's Nina, a stage actor seeking to boost her career. Despite the high-calibre cast (Mark Strong and Lesley Manville co-star), this adaptation of Anthony Quinn's novel *Curtain Call*, directed by Anand Tucker (*Hilary and Jackie*), struggles to sustain a consistent tone. Even as the bodies pile up, there's a lack of emotional charge. **TOM DAWSON**

CYBORG: A DOCUMENTARY 12A

★★★☆☆ **OUT 20 SEPTEMBER**

CINEMAS

This intimate documentary uses the case of colour-blind artist and self-styled 'cyborg' Neil Harbisson to unpack the ethical complexities of transhumanism. Installing an antenna in his head that allows him to 'hear' colour, Harbisson pushes the boundaries of human biology via augmentation.

Filmmaker Carey Born doesn't shy away from the darker side of her subject's life (like death threats from those who believe Harbisson is subverting God's will), even if the more dystopian side of transhumanism isn't fully interrogated. **JOEL HARLEY**

SUGARCANE TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 20 SEPTEMBER**

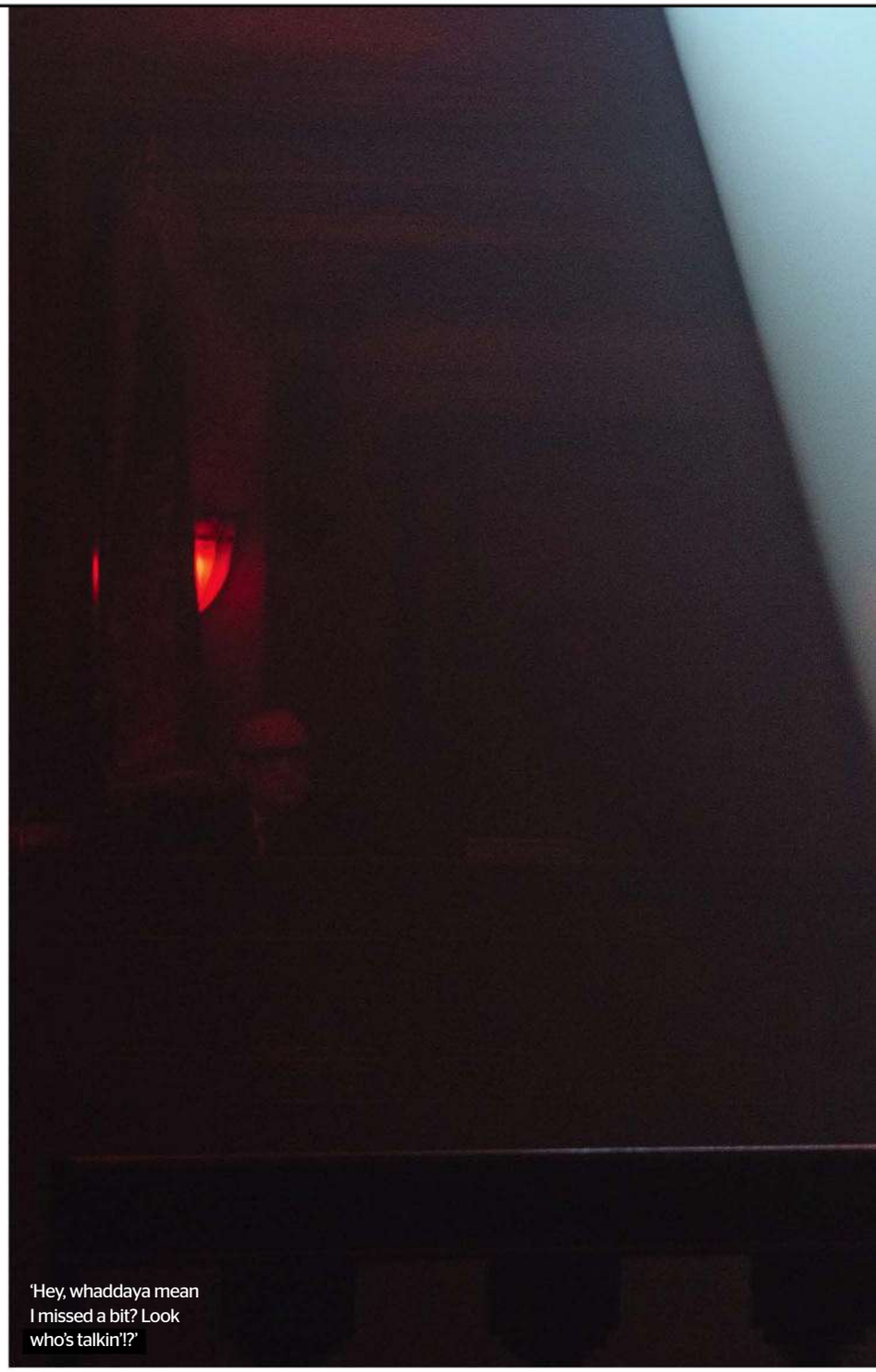
CINEMAS

Calling a film 'important' makes it sound like a chore to watch, but this Sundance-awarded doc is as engrossing as it is essential. It explores a shameful period in North American history when the Catholic Church sought to 'solve the Indian problem' with brutal boarding schools that resulted in the abuse and death of scores of Native American children. The cruelty that co-directors Emily Kassie and Julian Brave NoiseCat (the latter's family are among the interviewees) unveil is shocking, but the film stands as an inspiring tribute to those who persevered against the odds. **LEILA LATIF**

JOKER: FOLIE À DEUX TBC

Trial and error...

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 4 OCTOBER** CINEMAS



'Hey, whaddaya mean I missed a bit? Look who's talkin'!?'

Let's give the people what they want,' says Lady Gaga's Harleen 'Lee' Quinzel (aka Harley Quinn) at a key juncture in *Joker: Folie à Deux*. It's a perverse statement for a film that seems stubbornly committed to giving audiences quite the opposite. The much-anticipated sequel to Todd Phillips' Oscar-winning box-office champ is a bold departure from its lauded/loathed predecessor, but it's also a far less-effective vehicle for its tragi-comic subject and lead actor.

Two years after his murder spree, Arthur Fleck (Joaquin Phoenix) is now committed to Arkham State Hospital's brutal E-Ward, awaiting trial and a potential death sentence if peacocking DA Harvey Dent (Harry Lawtey) has his day in court. In music-therapy class Arthur meets Lee and sparks soon fly – literally when his arsonist admirer tries to burn Arkham down as an act of love; later, she becomes Joker's biggest cheerleader in court.

Beyond the inclusion of Lee – here stripped of the character's usual hallmarks and reduced to a spectator for much of the film – *Folie à Deux*'s biggest swing is that it's a jukebox musical, featuring 60s chart-toppers and Golden Age Hollywood hits. Arthur and Lee break into song with relentless regularity, and when there hasn't been a spot of spontaneous warbling for five minutes, a fantasy dance sequence is typically moments away. These stylised soundstage numbers are exquisitely shot – as is the rest of the film – by returning DoP Lawrence Sher. Gaga, likewise, gives them her all. But song and dance isn't Phoenix's forte and there isn't enough razzle-dazzle to the choreography or staging to impress on a technical level.

Of the other musical crimes, reducing Hildur Guðnadóttir's sublime doom-strings score to second chair deserves a spell in Blackgate Penitentiary, particularly when it perfectly rendered Arthur's mental state in the first film. Even worse, musical numbers are frequently deployed as the dramatic crescendo of a given scene. The upshot is that the pacing and momentum in otherwise dramatically compelling sequences – a tense interview with Steve Coogan's needling TV host Paddy Meyers being an example – is derailed as Arthur changes gear to put his thoughts into song, with most tracks seemingly selected for their painfully on-the-nose lyrics. Rarely has a film been so

DIRECTOR Todd Phillips **STARRING** Joaquin Phoenix, Lady Gaga, Brendan Gleeson, Catherine Keener, Zazie Beetz **SCREENPLAY** Scott Silver, Todd Phillips **DISTRIBUTOR** Warner Bros. **RUNNING TIME** 138 mins (TBC)

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

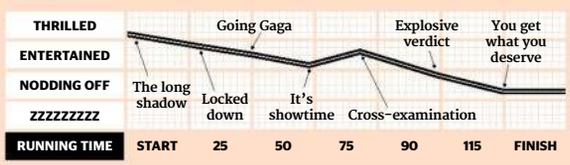
ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST
1975
If Phoenix's Fleck is a twisted R.P. McMurphy, Brendan Gleeson's belligerent guard is *FàD's* Nurse Ratched. Loathsome.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK
1977
Though it's Golden Age musicals that are referenced throughout, Scorsese's misfire is a close cousin, as *Taxi Driver*/*The King of Comedy* were to *Joker*.

PRIMAL FEAR
1996
FàD's melodramatic courtroom theatrics and legally dubious procedure feel like a 90s legal thriller play-by-play.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

FILM PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE™



SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

senselessly devoted to sabotaging its rich set-ups with flat pay-offs.

Unlike 2019's *Joker*, a knotty film with big ideas and profound empathy for its central figure, *Folie à Deux* feels smaller and more insular. Gone is the sense of Arthur's explosive transformation mirroring a Gotham City at a tipping point; rarely does the film even venture beyond the claustrophobic walls of Arkham or the courthouse. Instead, it's focused on the Arthur/Joker dichotomy – who is really in control? And can Lee tip the balance? However, given how few true 'Joker' sequences feature, it's clear where Phillips' interests lie.

'Song and dance isn't Phoenix's forte and there isn't enough razzle-dazzle to the choreography or staging to impress on a technical level'

Folie à Deux wants Arthur to reckon with the consequences of his (admittedly very criminal) actions and seems content for him to suffer without any of the first film's devilishly transgressive catharsis. The result is resoundingly downbeat to the point of feeling mean-spirited. There's no question this is a film made with integrity and an uncompromising vision, but evidently they can't all be hits. **JORDAN FARLEY**

THE VERDICT Part courtroom movie, part behind-bars romance, *Folie à Deux* is an unconventional musical sequel that fails to hit the high notes.

It's an out-of-body experience for Demi Moore in *The Substance*

THE SUBSTANCE 18

Intravenous proposal...

★★★★★ **OUT 20 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

Incredible prosthetics and a fierce performance from Demi Moore are the standouts in the thrilling second film from French writer/director Coralie Fargeat (2017's *Revenge*). Moore plays Elisabeth Sparkle, a fitness guru who's about to be ousted from her TV show by oily exec Harvey (Dennis Quaid) when she gets the chance to become a 'younger, better version' of herself. Injecting a mysterious liquid, her back splits open and out pops another persona (played by Margaret Qualley).

Reinventing herself as Sue, Qualley's youthful character is soon making a bid for TV fame, but fails to heed the instructions of 'The Substance', which demand she switch back to her original body every seven days. When Sue gets greedy, Elisabeth reacts adversely, prompting a battle for control – one that sees Fargeat let rip with unhinged practical FX, lashings of gore and nods to Brian Yuzna's *Society*.

Precision-tooled from the off – the antiseptic white-and-blood-red design scheme is particularly effective – this is a smart, savage look at ageing, beauty and the male gaze. Quaid and Qualley excel, but Moore delivers arguably a career-best performance, nailing Elisabeth's sense of regret over the reversal process. True, the final act could've been more judiciously edited and the fountains of blood do get tiresome. But this is an assured, blackly funny and outrageous horror film that will leave you roaring with approval. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT Packed with ideas, blood-curdling FX and a full-on Demi Moore, this is a movie you'll want to mainline.

DRAGONKEEPER PG

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 27 SEPTEMBER**

CINEMAS

A Spanish-Chinese co-production based on Carole Wilkinson's saga-spawning fantasy novel, this uninspired animation follows Ping (Mayalinee Griffiths), an enslaved orphan in Han Imperial China. Living in a time when dragons have been banished, Ping finds one of the species' last remaining eggs – and so begins an epic odyssey as she races to save the winged fire-belchers from extinction. Sporting workaday direction and bland visuals, *Dragonkeeper* is held aloft only by colourful turns from Bill Nighy and Bill Bailey. Underwhelming. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

REAWAKENING 15

★★★☆☆ **OUT 13 SEPTEMBER**

CINEMAS

Juliet Stevenson and Jared Harris put in strong performances as a couple haunted by the disappearance of their daughter a decade ago. When a 24-year-old woman (*Firebrand*'s Erin Doherty) appears, claiming to be their long-lost girl, their reactions are wildly different. Is it really her? And what matters most here: the truth, or regaining the sense of a family unit? Virginia Gilbert's film has a low-budget feel but an intriguing and increasingly gripping story, taking a thought-provoking stance on themes of certainty, perception and relationships. **ANNA SMITH**

BOONIE BEARS: TIME TWIST PG

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 13 SEPTEMBER**

CINEMAS

Huge in its native China, the *Boonie Bears* brand has notched up a number of feature-length releases in the UK. This latest dubbed animation makes few concessions to those unfamiliar with forest-dwelling ursine sibs Briar and Bramble. Eagerly jumping on the multiverse bandwagon, *Time Twist* plonks human character Vick in the middle of a convoluted sci-fi adventure that plays like a mix of *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Across the Spider-Verse*, albeit with neither's visual or emotional punch. **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

IN CAMERA 15

★★★★☆ **OUT 13 SEPTEMBER**

CINEMAS

Writer/director Naqqash Khalid's distinctive debut centres on Aden (Nabhaan Rizwan), a young actor whose identity becomes increasingly fractured as he attempts to navigate the British industry, enduring one failed audition after another. It's a bold and fascinating piece exploring the frustrations of being a creative, flexible artist when all that others can see is 'a Middle Eastern one'. Khalid's handling of the more fantastical scenes may at times leave the viewer feeling a little befuddled, but there's no doubt the filmmaker is a vivid new voice in British cinema. **LEILA LATIF**

CONIC, DAZZLER MEDIA, ICON, MODERN FILMS, MUBI, SIGNATURE, VERTIGO

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

STRANGE DARLING 18

Date fright...

★★★★★ **OUT 20 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

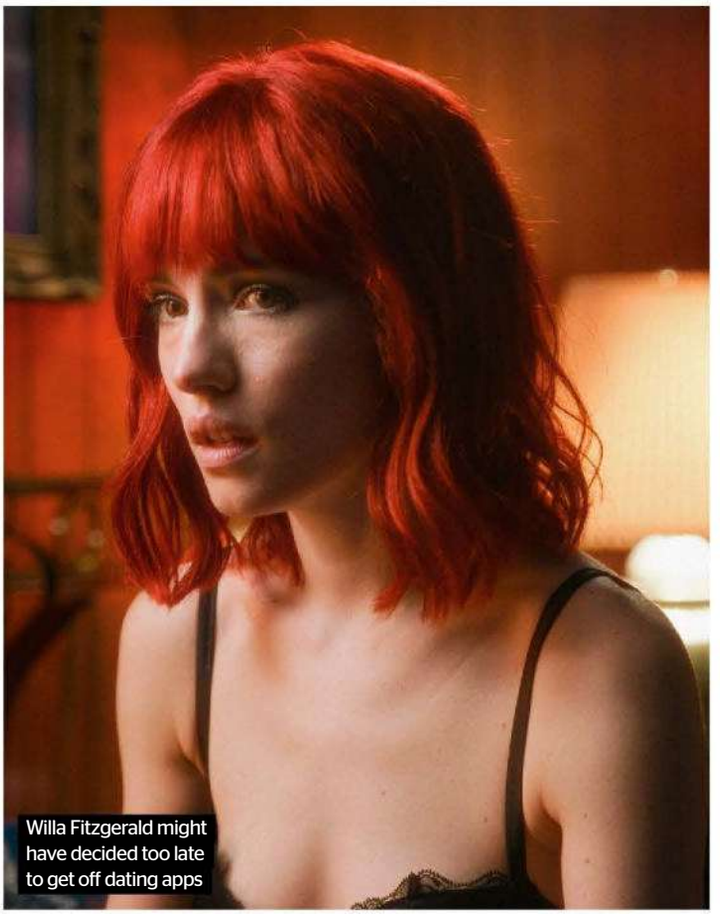
L*onglegs* isn't the only independent serial-killer movie to make a splash this year. *Strange Darling*, by writer/director J.T. Mollner, landed in the US to a 100% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes, and was endorsed on X by Stephen King: 'It's really terrific... a clever masterpiece.'

Separated into six chapters presented in non-linear fashion, this horror thriller at first appears like it might be a bit too clever for its own good. But it soon emerges that the time-hopping, flip-flopping structure is in place for shrewd narrative reasons. Our readiness to fill in the story gaps and make assumptions are craftily toyed with as we're drip-fed titbits of information while watching a one-night stand spiral into a spree of killings in the state of Oregon.

Boasting great music cues, vivid 35mm lensing (by, of all people, character actor Giovanni Ribisi, who makes a classy feature-film DoP debut here) and engaging gender politics that establish Mollner's interest in more than just the thrill of the chase, *Strange Darling* is a slick game of cat and mouse.

That it keeps viewers invested and wired throughout is also down to a brace of terrific central performances: Kyle Gallner (*Scream*, *Smile*) oozes charm and menace as The Demon, while Willa Fitzgerald (*Scream: The TV Series*, *Reacher*), simply credited as The Lady, is sure as hell gonna make him remember her name. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT A smart thriller that twists like a killer's blade in your gut. Go in cold if you can.



Willa Fitzgerald might have decided too late to get off dating apps

Growing pains for school swot Mira (Preeti Panigrahi)

GIRLS WILL BE GIRLS 15

First lust...

★★★★★ **OUT 20 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

A star student has a sexual awakening in this terrific drama, which is much more than just a coming-of-age saga. Sixteen-year-old Mira (played by an excellent Preeti Panigrahi) is the first girl to be made top prefect at a strict Indian boarding school in the Himalayas. There's an instant attraction between her and new student Sri (Kesav Binoy Kiron), which the pair explore in ways both playful and responsible.

Endearingly, Mira treats sexual preparation much like she does her homework – and she clearly enjoys both. In her debut feature, writer/director Shuchi Talati neatly dispenses with well-worn college-movie archetypes: this seemingly prim swot of a teenager can also be horny, silly, funny, jealous, angry...

The latter two feelings might be justified when it comes to Mira's mother Anila (Kani Kusruti, star of 2024 Cannes prize-winner *All We Imagine as Light*). In a series of darkly funny and increasingly awkward scenes, Anila welcomes Sri to her home and begins to flirt with him, creating opportunities to be alone with him as the horrified Mira wonders how far this might go. And so do we, as this strange love triangle makes the film as compelling as it is progressive. Exploring contemporary issues such as gender equality, ageing and consent, Talati navigates desire and identity in a way that's both universal and specific to the film's cultural setting. **ANNA SMITH**

THE VERDICT An engaging and believable character portrait that's all the more rewarding for busting teen-movie clichés.

Torn between past and present: Saoirse Ronan in *The Outrun*

THE OUTRUN 15

The long way home...

★★★★★ **OUT 27 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

It never gets easy – it just gets less hard.' So goes the advice to recovering alcoholic Rona (Saoirse Ronan) in Nora Fingscheidt's (*System Crasher*) drama, based on Amy Liptrot's bestselling memoir. We first meet Rona when she's reluctantly living back home in Orkney with her mother (Saskia Reeves). She's clearly desperate for friends, and the folks in Mum's Bible club aren't going to cut it. But returning to London would likely be too much temptation, as we see in flashbacks showing Rona's descent into an addiction that cost her everything she held dear.

There's a stark contrast in style and pace between the scenes in the capital and those on the windswept islands. Some of Rona's memories have the juddery excitement of a giddy party; others pause for a romantic moment with her ex-boyfriend. As the film progresses, the flashbacks become more disturbing – we join in Rona's alarm as she wakes up with no memory from a violent, drunken night. It all feels horribly believable, unlike many an on-screen alcoholic episode.

Whether in self-destructive mode or a subdued mood, Ronan is as mesmerising as ever. Strong support includes Stephen Dillane as her father, whose mental-health problems Rona fears she has inherited. Paapa Essiedu is sympathetic as her ex Daynin, his patience tested to the limit. Meanwhile, Reeves is excellent as the well-meaning but disapproving mother. **ANNA SMITH**

THE VERDICT An exceptional performance from Saoirse Ronan powers this affecting drama about addiction and hope.

ROB PEACE 15

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Chiwetel Ejiofor's directorial follow-up to 2019's *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* tells another true-life story of struggle and adversity that again sees him cast himself as the young protagonist's father. But *Rob Peace* is a far more sombre affair as it chronicles its title character's ill-fated attempts to juggle a life in Ivy League academia with the demands imposed by his incarcerated dad.

Ejiofor is ace as jailbird Skeet and gets a similarly accomplished performance from newcomer Jay Will. Alas, Ejiofor's script, adapting a biography written by Jeff Hobbs, feels simplistic and schematic. **NEIL SMITH**

AZRAEL: ANGEL OF DEATH TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 30 SEPTEMBER** DIGITAL **7 OCTOBER** DVD, BD

Samara Weaving's survivalist gusto energises this taut, gory apocalypto-religious horror from director E.L. Katz (*Cheap Thrills*). Years 'after the Rapture', Weaving's mute Azrael is hunted by a cult for sacrificial purposes; meanwhile, charred risen corpses roam the landscape, devouring human prey. Mysteries mount: what's with the church? And the pregnant woman? Keep guessing.

A scrappy, feral Weaving commits fully, but character and story are undernourished, making it hard to care who gets their head torn off next. **KEVIN HARLEY**

LORE 15

★★★★★ **OUT 27 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

This lo-fi British anthology movie sees four mates telling each other horror tales while huddled around a campfire in the woods. We get, in turn, a man-in-a-suit monster, a ghost story, a witchy occult ritual, and a masked killer slashing patrons in a cinema.

It's unambitious but mildly diverting, featuring in-jokes, a couple of decent kills and an effective *Crypt Keeper*-style host in the form of Richard Brake (*Hannibal Rising*) and his creepy rictus grin. There's also a coda that adds a meta twist, which doesn't quite come off. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

BLACK DOG 15

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** DIGITAL

The leads hold the road nicely in debut director George Jaques's cheap but charming Brit-pic. When cocky foster kid Nathan (Jamie Flatters, also co-writer) rescues nervy Sam (Keenan Munn-Francis) from a beating, Sam repays his saviour by driving him from London to Newcastle. The reasons for the trip gradually emerge over miles of bickering, banter and bonding, as this odd couple realise what they share. These are old roads, true, but the stars' easy chemistry endears, aided by Jaques' sensitive steer on themes of masculinity, mental health and mourning. **KEVIN HARLEY**

STUDIOCANAL, REPUBLIC PICTURES, SIGNATURE, ICON, VERTIGO, NETFLIX, METFILM

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

WILL & HARPER 15

Voyage of self-discovery...

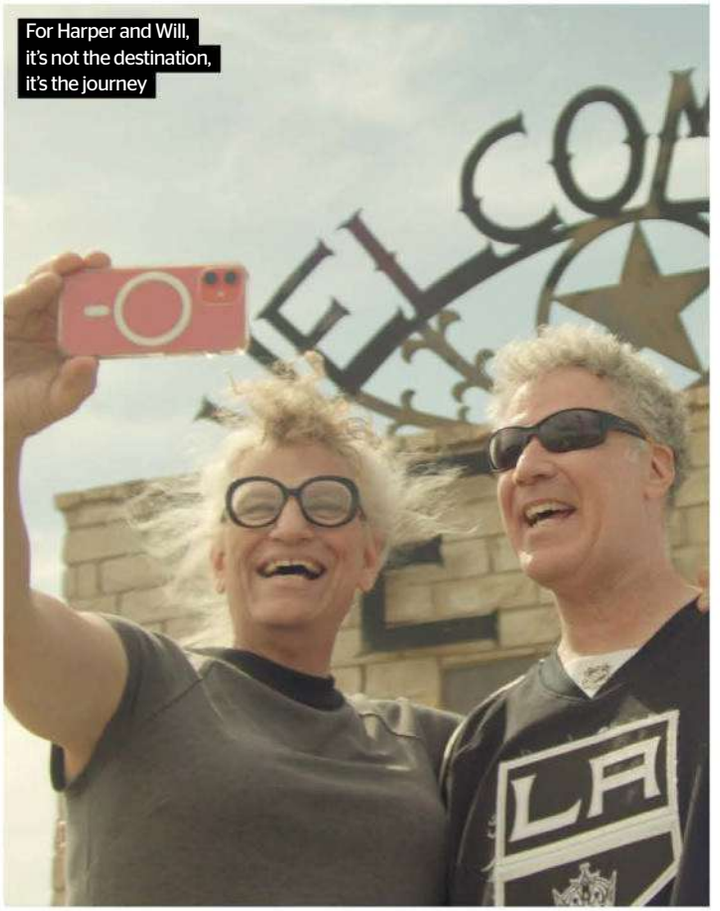
★★★★★ **OUT 13 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS
27 SEPTEMBER NETFLIX

At the heart of this likeable, gently moving doc is a road trip taken by Will Ferrell and his longtime friend and collaborator Harper Steele, a trans woman who transitioned later in life. Ferrell embraces his friend's identity without hesitation – but, like many would, he has some awkward questions. So when Steele decides to undertake the kind of road trip she's taken throughout her life, albeit for the first time as Harper, Will (and cameras) join.

The film's biggest strength is the way it opens up a dialogue between friends, and makes space for understanding, with Ferrell a sensitive, empathetic inquisitor. Director Josh Greenbaum (*Barb and Star Go to Vista Del Mar*, Lazenby doc *Becoming Bond*) follows without intruding or making the route feel too predetermined. It's a template you could imagine working for other subjects in need of friendly, open dialogue.

By its very nature, it's hard not to occasionally wonder about how far this 'candid' doc has been edited and orchestrated – not least in the moments where Ferrell digs into the dress-up box, or at the very beginning when he riffs (amusingly) on the format's tropes – while a couple of brands are mentioned frequently enough to give off the whiff of product placement. But when raw emotions are on display, *Will & Harper* feels authentic – as do Will and Harper. **MATT MAYTUM**

THE VERDICT Not everyone has an A-list pal like Ferrell to help them through difficult times, but his compassionate approach is a welcome model.



For Harper and Will, it's not the destination, it's the journey

Arieh Worthalter feels the courage of his convictions

THE GOLDMAN CASE 12A

Court in the crossfire...

★★★★★ **OUT 20 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

French cinema seems to have a particular penchant for courtroom drama at the moment. Following on from Alice Diop's *Saint Omer* and Justine Triet's *Anatomy of a Fall*, writer/director Cédric Kahn's gripping feature recreates a controversial trial from mid-1970s France, in which the Jewish left-wing revolutionary Pierre Goldman (played with magnetic intensity by Belgian actor Arieh Worthalter) appealed against his convictions for two murders committed during armed robberies.

Save for a brief legal-chambers prologue, the film unfolds entirely in the claustrophobic and emotionally charged surroundings of a packed Amiens courtroom. Kahn adopts a pared-down approach to his storytelling: Academy-ratio framing, no flashbacks, no musical score, and a drab colour palette. The focus is on the militant Goldman, who is defended by attorney Georges Kiejman (Arthur Harari), also from a Polish Jewish background. The accused stubbornly refuses to call character witnesses in his own defence, on the grounds that he wants to be judged by facts, not appeals to emotion, while the prosecutors have a number of individuals prepared to testify against him.

Although it's set nearly 50 years ago, *The Goldman Case* illuminates contemporary France. What's revealed in the accusations and counterclaims is a bitterly divided society, marred by racism, antisemitism, police brutality and institutional corruption. **TOM DAWSON**

THE VERDICT Cédric Kahn's superbly acted courtroom drama is an absorbing portrait of a 1970s French revolutionary.

Take hold of the horn stumps - Hellboy is back!

HELLBOY: THE CROOKED MAN 15

Returning Red...

★★★☆☆ **OUT 27 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

If Neil Marshall's 2019 *Hellboy* had you seeing red, then this rendition by director/co-writer Brian Taylor (*Crank*) will come as a relief. It's the closest big-screen version yet to Dark Horse Comics' shorn-horn superhero – creator Mike Mignola had a sizeable hand (ahem) in the screenplay – and favours gruff 'n' rough over the poetry of Guillermo del Toro's lovingly crafted noughties movies.

Adapted from the 2008 *The Crooked Man* series, *HTCM* is set in Appalachia, 1959, as our half-human, half-demon hero (Jack Kesy, nailing the sarcasm-and-soul combo) teams up with rookie Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense agent Bobbie Jo Song (Adeline Rudolph, underused) to battle the region's Devil (Martin Bassindale). This is an evocative world of mist and murk, blind preachers and sold souls, where a witch climbs back into her human skin after taking skunk form at night to snuffle through the forest.

After a flavoursome first half featuring crepuscular, shallow-focus photography and backwoods dialect as tangy and prickly as wild gooseberries, Taylor's film descends into a couple of extended set-piece battles. Some sore-thumb CGI amid the largely practical effects, and the odd gimmicky edit, are further impediments. But there's plenty here to celebrate – enough to leave you hoping that Taylor makes good on his plan to revisit Hellboy in the 60s, 70s and 80s. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT Embraces the comics' folk-horror vibe, but the balance of atmosphere and ass-kicking is slightly off.

LEE 15

Snap decisions...

★★★☆☆ **OUT 13 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

'I'd rather take a picture than be one,' barks US model-turned-photojournalist Lee Miller (a deliciously brusque Kate Winslet), revealing the extraordinary stories behind her famous WW2 photos. Exploring how a one-time art muse fought to report atrocities, this handsome but conventional biopic showcases a tip-top Winslet performance but at times meanders like a weighty Wikipedia entry.

Veteran cinematographer Ellen Kuras' first directing gig drifts lyrically through Miller's bohemian pre-war French era and a photogenic if lifeless affair with Alexander Skarsgård's Brit Roland Penrose. It leaps to life once Miller finds her wartime photographic passion, snapping Blitz firefighters for *Vogue* then haring across newly liberated France and Germany with the US Army, doggedly recording the horrors she finds while Alexandre Desplat's lush score hints at her despair.

Kudos to Kuras for not sandpapering Miller's determination, which pushes her through heavy shelling in Saint-Malo, and into Dachau and Buchenwald to record the horrors witnessed there. Defying bans on women reporters, Winslet's Miller is a reckless, hard-drinking obsessive whose prickly unlikeability recalls *Mare of Easttown*. However, in contrast, Miller's friends and lovers (including Andy Samberg's David Scherman) come off as one-note characters. The woman who cheekily photographed herself washing in Hitler's bathtub deserves a wilder, bolder biopic than this glossy but slightly stodgy effort. **KATE STABLES**

THE VERDICT Winslet's wonderful in this wartime biopic, but it needs less pathos and more punch.

Ready, aim, shoot: Kate Winslet as pioneering war photographer Lee Miller

AMAZON/MGM, CURZON, ENTERTAINMENT, ICON, HAMID JANIPOUR, MEIFILM, SIGNATURE, SKY

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

'So, if you're from the future, who wins this year's *Strictly*?'

MY OLD ASS 15

Trip of a lifetime...

★★★★★ **OUT 27 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

A teenager takes mushrooms and is visited by her 39-year-old self, played by Aubrey Plaza... This Sundance hit certainly has an intriguing set-up. While it might sound like a stoner sci-fi, *My Old Ass* is nuanced and sensitive, unfolding as a queer coming-of-age story that muses on life choices and relationships.

Maisy Stella charms as Elliott, a pleasant and faintly rebellious teen. She's also just met up with a girl she likes, and is keen to seal the deal. But when she and her mates take a trip, Elliott is suddenly visited by her future self. It's both humorous and compelling watching the two chat: one full of curiosity, the other witty caution.

One of the key warnings given is to stay away from a guy called Chad. But when Chad (Percy Hynes White) starts working for her dad, Elliott is increasingly drawn to him. The mystery of why exactly he's bad news keeps us guessing and also poses an intriguing question: would you trust and obey your future self unreservedly?

It's a puzzler that holds the interest throughout the film, but there's plenty besides to enjoy, from Plaza's mysterious, comical appearances to Stella's candid chats with her friends – including *West Side Story*'s Maddie Ziegler as Ruthie – about life, love and everything. Having begun her career as an actor, Megan Park (*The Fallout*) continues to mark herself as a writer/director to watch. **ANNA SMITH**

THE VERDICT A delightfully funny and unexpectedly emotional coming-of-age drama, with an enticing whiff of time travel, enriched by two fine lead performances.

GREEDY PEOPLE TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 23 SEPTEMBER**

DIGITAL

Two cops (Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Himesh Patel) stumble on the set-up for a spousal hit in this agreeable Coen brothers-lite comedy thriller from director Potsy Ponciroli (2021's *Old Henry*). The duo make off with a stash of cash that becomes the driving factor in a story where the bodies – and laughs – soon start piling up. Standouts among the fine support are Lily James as Patel's pregnant wife and Coen regular Tim Blake Nelson, ace as the shrimp magnate whose plan to bump off his wife (Traci Lords) sets in motion the bloody chain of events. Good, grimy fun. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE CROW 18

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

There are things to like in Rupert Sanders' ultra-violent new take on James O'Barr's 1989 comic book, which leans into the origins of the story's ill-fated lovers. There's chemistry between Bill Skarsgård's Eric and FKA Twigs' Shelly, and moments of grandeur when Eric – back from the dead after he and Shelly are brutally murdered – carves a path of leather-coated vengeance through NYC. But cringey dialogue, a rushed final act and Danny Huston's incongruously demonic antagonist ultimately leave this Crow grounded, and with little chance of enjoying the same legacy as the cult-classic 94 adap. **FAY WATSON**

THE BATTLE FOR LAIKIPIA TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 4 OCTOBER** CINEMAS

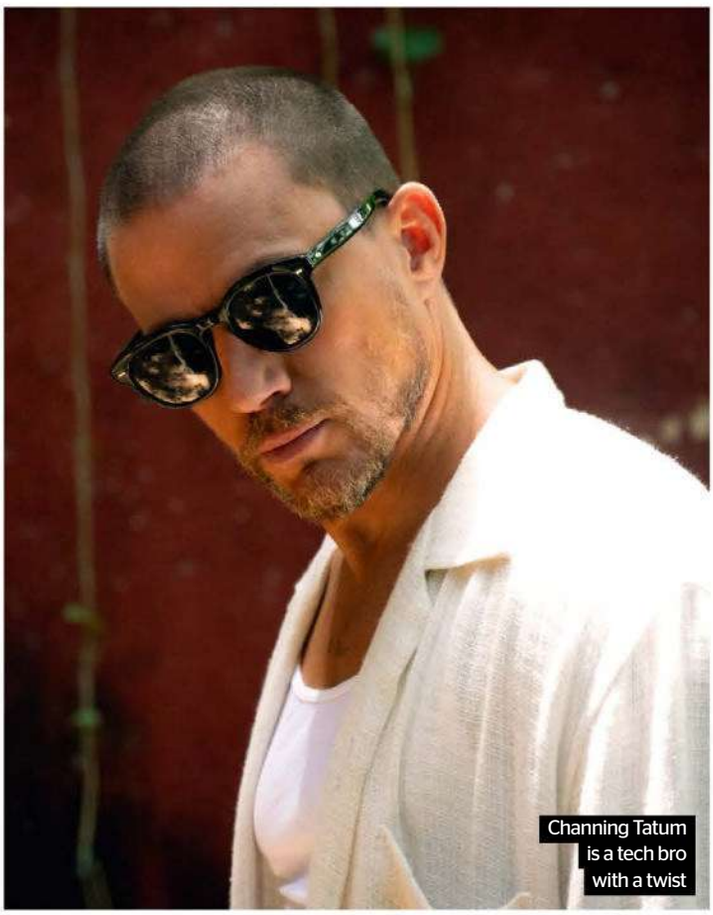
Daphne Matziaraki and Peter Murimi's nuanced documentary explores the collision of colonial-era injustices and today's climate emergency in Kenya's Laikipia region. Vast tracts of land are owned by white ranchers, who make a living from safari tourism and wildlife conservation. Meanwhile, the indigenous Samburu people struggle to find grassland for their cattle because of repeated droughts. Amid some fine cinematography, *The Battle for Laikipia* patiently conveys the perspectives of both sides in this conflict over natural resources. **TOM DAWSON**

MY FAVOURITE CAKE 12A

★★★★★ **OUT 13 SEPTEMBER**

CINEMAS

Co-directed with real sensitivity by Maryam Moghadam and Behtash Sanaeeha, this pleasingly crafty Iranian drama takes you down a surprising but engaging path. Lili Farhadpour plays spirited widow Mahin, who finds unexpected romance when she meets sweet-natured taxi driver Faramarz (Esmaeel Mehrabi), and invites him back to her place for a drink, a dance and a cuddle. Subtly exploring the place of women in Iran, and the restrictions imposed on citizens, it's warmly acted, with a third act that will emotionally crush you. **JAMES MOTTRAM**



Channing Tatum is a tech bro with a twist

BLINK TWICE 15

Island strife...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Zoë Kravitz takes a thrilling leap from acting to directing with her searing feature debut. If *Blink Twice* doesn't *quite* hit the heady heights of Jordan Peele's *Get Out* as a socially engaged and satirical thriller, it plays in the same ballpark, dauntlessly taking on gender, class and racial dynamics that are cruel and widespread.

Naomi Ackie (*Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance with Somebody*) plays down-on-her-luck waitress Frida, who accepts an invitation from tech billionaire Slater King (Channing Tatum) to stay at his stylishly appointed private island. This luxurious setting is populated by partygoers (and poisonous snakes) – but from the first close-up on a reptilian face, it's clear something is amiss.

Kravitz takes her time revealing what is actually happening there, leading to a masterful twist that recontextualises prior scenes and lends new meaning to small pieces of dialogue. Meanwhile, the scintillating Ackie and Tatum receive pitch-perfect support from an idiosyncratic ensemble including Adria Arjona, Alia Shawkat, Simon Rex and Christian Slater, playing misfits who often keep their motives close to their chests while still being people you would want to party with – particularly during an exquisitely timed needle-drop of *Young Hearts Run Free*.

The influences of *The Stepford Wives* on plot and *The Shining*'s Overlook Hotel on set design are thoughtfully utilised and, even if the world portrayed is a dark place, the talent on display simply dazzles. **LEILA LATIF**

THE VERDICT Zoë Kravitz makes a phenomenal debut as director with this heightened, gripping thriller.

JUSTICE LEAGUE: CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS TRILOGY 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** 4K UHD, DIGITAL

EXTRAS ★★★☆☆ Featurettes

The 'Tomorrowverse' era of DC's animated superhero universe bows out with a three-part epic based on the iconic mid-1980s comic-book crossover of the same name. However, where the comic had decades of continuity to clear up, this doesn't – instead creating its own multiversal mess that needs to be tidied away. The end result is overwrought and (despite all the deep-cut cameos) surprisingly dull. Just like that, the short-lived Tomorrowverse has already become yesterday's news. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

THE VOURDALAK 15

★★★★☆ **OUT 16 SEPTEMBER** DIGITAL

Adapted from an 1839 novella by Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy, this darkly comic French horror also draws influence from the gothic cinema of Hammer and Roger Corman. Shot on Super 16mm with natural lighting, Adrien Beau's spellbinding debut is beautifully eerie, thanks in no small part to its titular villain, a bloodsucking revenant haunting an already crazed family and their house guest. The skeletal vourdalak is realised entirely through practical FX, driving a stake through the claim of *Sesame Street*'s Count to vampire-puppet supremacy. **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

IT ENDS WITH US 15

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

A story involving domestic violence and coercive control comes with an incongruously glossy sheen in this take on Colleen Hoover's bestseller of the same name. Producer/star Blake Lively's Lily falls for handsome neurosurgeon Ryle (Justin Baldoni, also directing) despite signs of his volatile streak. With its glam couture and sumptuous interiors, Baldoni's lush melodrama at times seems rather too content to wallow in consumerist fantasy. Still, when it comes to the assaults its heroine endures, Christy Hall's screenplay is admirably astute, carrying a ring of emotional truth. **NEIL SMITH**

PORTRAITS OF DANGEROUS WOMEN

TBC

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 4 OCTOBER** CINEMAS

Pascal Bergamin's comedy drama sadly fails to deliver anything resembling the excitement promised by its title. Inspired by Peter J. Cohen's book of photography *Snapshots of Dangerous Women*, this English-countryside-set tale stars Yasmin Monet Prince as Ashley, whose life is upended when her dog is fatally wounded in a road accident involving three other people. As the lives of these strangers (including teacher Tara Fitzgerald) intersect, bonds start to grow, but the film refuses to take flight. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

WARNER, BLUE FINCH, SONY, BULLDOG, VERTIGO, MIRACLE COMMS, SIGNATURE, 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

AND MRS 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** DIGITAL

A wedding *and* a funeral feature in this tonally erratic romcom, in which Londoner Gemma (Aisling Bea) decides her wedding to American fiancé Nathan (Colin Hanks) must go on, despite having just lost him to a paradoxical embolism. Director Daniel Reisinger strives to squeeze both chuckles and sniffles from the ensuing imbroglio, with the enthusiastic aid of an eclectic ensemble cast (Susan Wokoma, Sinead Cusack, Peter Egan). Alas, like the deceased groom's overbearingly kooky sister (Billie Lourd), *And Mrs* isn't as much fun as it thinks it is, and soon outstays its welcome. **NEIL SMITH**

THE TEACHER 12A

★★★☆☆ **OUT 27 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

Written and directed by Palestinian-British filmmaker Farah Nabulsi, this heartfelt drama blends the personal and the political in its portrayal of a middle-aged English teacher Basem (Saleh Bakri), living in a village in the occupied West Bank. Can he dissuade one of his students, Adam (Muhammad Abed Elrahman), from taking revenge on the Israeli settler who killed his brother? Although a romantic subplot feels superfluous, the film conveys the brutal injustices and traumas endured by generations of Palestinian citizens, and Bakri is compelling. **TOM DAWSON**

TRAP 15

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

M. Night Shyamalan drops the goofy twists for this intense thriller, in which Josh Hartnett's serial killer Cooper takes his teen daughter Riley (Ariel Donoghue) to a concert by Lady Raven (Shyamalan's daughter Saleka). Slowly, Cooper realises the gig is an FBI ruse to nab him… Shyamalan overindulges the Raven sequences, but *Trap* is a mostly taut affair that ties a rope around Hartnett's throat and keeps squeezing as the show goes on. Hartnett is an effective villain, but Donoghue steals the show, vacillating persuasively between teenage elation and terror. **KEN MCINTYRE**

200% WOLF U

★★★☆☆ **OUT 20 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

A sequel to – you guessed it – *100% Wolf* (2020), this Aussie animation finds young Freddy Lupin (Ilai Swindells) morphing from werepoodle to werewolf proper after wishing upon a star. The same magic also unleashes a chaotic moon spirit, which Freddy's paw patrol (including standout Samara Weaving) must return home to rebalance the cosmos. The lush palette and madcap action should keep young viewers engaged, while bonuses for adults include easy-going humour, a worthy message and Jennifer Saunders having a howling-good time. **JOEL HARLEY**

Indoor fireworks are *not* permitted on space stations

ALIEN: ROMULUS 15

Bites off more than it can chew…

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

After various baggy saga entries, *Alien: Romulus* opens with a retrieval operation that hints at director Fede Alvarez's (2013's *Evil Dead*) back-to-basics, franchise-saving intentions. It's an aim that's only partly fulfilled by an in-between-quel – post-*Alien*, pre-*Aliens* – that aspires to be all things to all Alien fans. Often tense and tangible, *Romulus* freights its leaner pleasures with excess franchise matter, to frustrating effect.

Rain (Cailee Spaeny), her synthetic 'brother'/protector Andy (David Jonsson) and friends are preparing to flee the Jackson's Star colony, via an illicit jaunt to decommissioned space station the *Renaissance*. On board, however, terrible truths about the ship's salvage work and experiments emerge… Soon, our runaways are running and screaming to order. They're also hell-bent on quoting other Alien films, to increasingly corny effect. The plot sometimes seems sculpted around such homages. The set-pieces suffer likewise, although Alvarez's *Don't Breathe* form is felt during facehugger lunges in cryo-chambers and elsewhere.

The practical FX are pleasingly tactile, while Benjamin Wallfisch's score summons the eerie grandeur of Goldsmith and Horner judiciously. But the film's climax stumbles more than it strikes as it echoes an ill-remembered Alien film. Sometimes bold, sometimes over-reverent, *Romulus* might have executed a cleaner lift-off had Alvarez ejected some of the series' baggage more decisively. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT Come for shocks, suspense and Spaeny; mind the franchise mytho-stodge.

Anne Hathaway stars as astronaut Amelia Brand

INTERSTELLAR 12A

Cosmic love...

2014 ★★★★★ **OUT 27 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

Between the urban/global wars of *The Dark Knight Rises* and *Dunkirk*, Christopher Nolan rocketed off-world on a theme of love for his ninth feature, making a 10th-anniversary return voyage to cinemas. Fusing poetry and pipe organs with meditations on quantum science and temporality, *Interstellar* is a leap-of-faith wonder that upholds the heart as humanity's defining defence against binding cosmic absolutes: time, notably, and its attendant costs.

A parent/child tale of separation and sacrifice drives the film, with Matthew McConaughey's pilot Cooper cutting himself off Batman-style from all he holds dear. Joining Anne Hathaway and others to travel through space and find humanity a new home, he discovers miracles but loses his family as time travels faster beyond the wormhole than on Earth.

Coop's much-meme'd but still heartrending communications with his fast-growing kids are the crux of Nolan's attempts to navigate the divide between rationalism and emotion. Some critics took issue with Nolan's 'sentimentality', but the director avoids button-pushing, splicing feeling and philosophical ideas for the tesseract sequence.

The fact that so many of *Interstellar*'s visuals are tangibly handmade (look, books!) upholds the film's humanity, as does humour – the robots get the best zingers. And he secured a simpatico co-traveller in Hans Zimmer, whose score embodies the film's character sublimely: majestic, mysterious and indelible in its emotional immediacy. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT Nolan's soulful epic is the hard-science head-spinner you can feel: a great leap worth retaking.

SINGLE WHITE FEMALE 18

1992 ★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** BD

EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

Commentary, Featurettes, Booklet

A newly single software designer (Bridget Fonda) gets far more than she bargained for when she opens the door of her spacious Manhattan apartment to an obsessive roommate (Jennifer Jason Leigh) in a well-acted suspenser. Riding the same cinematic wave that gave audiences *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* and *Poison Ivy*, this slick and sexy female-led thriller feels a little less progressive today (there are hints of lesbophobia), but underneath the mounting hysteria is an oddly affecting study of loneliness. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK 15

2004 ★★☆☆☆

OUT 16 SEPTEMBER 4K UHD, BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★

Alternate cut, Commentaries, Documentary, Featurettes, Deleted scenes, Video game cut-scenes, Booklet

Dispensing with the unassuming thrills of David Twohy's efficient *Pitch Black* (2000), this bloated sequel transforms Vin Diesel's antihero into the saviour of the entire universe. If the result falls way short of its epic aspirations, the same cannot be said for this Riddick-ulously stacked three-disc limited edition with its seemingly endless array of extra features and 4K restorations of two different cuts of the movie. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

HAPPINESS 18

1998 ★★★★☆

OUT 30 SEPTEMBER 4K UHD, BD

EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

Featurettes, Essay

Playing like the subdued, messed-up cousin of PTA's *Magnolia*, Todd Solondz's ensemble comedy follows a family as they fumble through heartache in search of, well, happiness. The pitch-perfect cast (Philip Seymour Hoffman, Jane Adams, Lara Flynn Boyle, Dylan Baker…) sells Solondz's vision of purgatory in New Jersey, and the midnight-black laughs are underlaid by empathy. This 4K Criterion release is extras-lite but features a chat between Solondz and *Aftersun* director Charlotte Wells. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

MEAN GIRLS 12A

2004 ★★★★☆

OUT 27 SEPTEMBER CINEMAS

Get in, loser, we're celebrating 20 years of Mark Waters' acerbic high-school comedy. *Mean Girls* has become a generational touchstone, largely thanks to a highly quotable screenplay from Tina Fey, inspired by Rosalind Wiseman's book *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, while Lindsay Lohan and Rachel McAdams are well-matched in their battle for Plastic superiority, delivering career-defining turns as the New Girl Turned Bad and Apex Predator. The past two decades of sanitised studio comedies have only made its eye-watering zingers feel more savage. **JOEL HARLEY**

ARROW, CRITERION, PARAMOUNT, PARK CIRCUS, POWERHOUSE, SPIRIT, UNIVERSAL, WARNER BROS.

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

SHAUN OF THE DEAD 15

Children of the Cornetto...

2004 ★★★★★ **OUT 27 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

Back in cinemas for its 20th(!) anniversary, Edgar Wright's first big-screen team-up with *Spaced* pals Simon Pegg and Nick Frost is every bit as good as you remember. Nodding to George A. Romero's undead oeuvre, this London-set horror-comedy odyssey stars Pegg as Shaun, a directionless electronics salesman whose relationship with Liz (Kate Ashfield) is going down the toilet because he'd rather spend nights in the pub with layabout flatmate Ed (Frost).

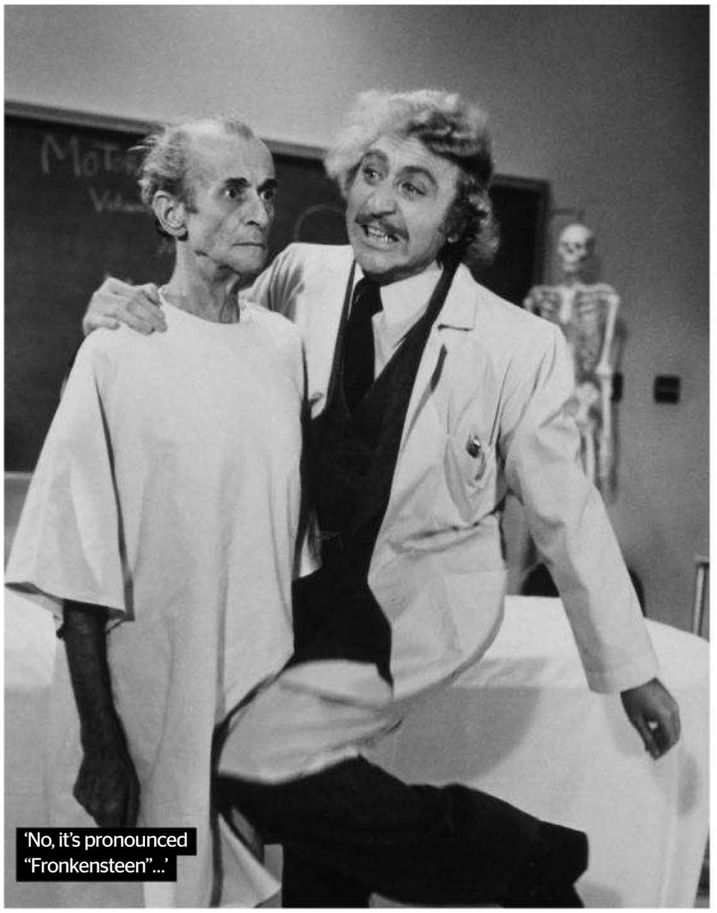
Unbeknown to them, a zombie pandemic is sweeping the capital, one that's about to rudely awaken our slacker heroes' survival instincts. Soon enough, Shaun, Ed and Liz, alongside Shaun's mum Barbara (Penelope Wilton) and stepdad Philip (Bill Nighy), plus Liz's snooty friends Dianne (Lucy Davis) and David (Dylan Moran), find themselves dodging flesh-munchers on the streets of leafy Crouch End.

Co-writers Pegg and Wright tap into the traditions of the zombie film, serving up plenty of icky bloodshed and genuine jeopardy (loss will be felt). Spring-loaded with some inventive violence (not least the classic set piece where vinyl records – sorry, Dire Straits fans – become lethal weapons) and seasoned with a wicked sense of humour, it rarely lets up. But amid all the gags and gore, this first salvo in the Three Flavours Cornetto trilogy remains a delightful riff on friendship, relationships and commitment. You might even shed a tear or two.

JAMES MOTTRAM

THE VERDICT Age hasn't withered Wright's rom-zom-com. Sharp, funny and surprisingly moving, it's an undying gem.

A *Shaun of the Dead* reissue? How's that for a slice of fried gold?!



'No, it's pronounced "Fronkensteen"...'

YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN 12A

Mel Brooks' genius creation...

1974 ★★★★★ **OUT 4 OCTOBER** CINEMAS

Spoof? Horror comedy? However you categorise Mel Brooks' riff on James Whale's *Frankenstein* (with a bit of *Bride of Frankenstein* stitched on for good measure), *Young Frankenstein* stands among the best of its subgenre. Now 50 years Young, it's back in cinemas to elicit yummy sounds.

Gene Wilder is by turns subtle and broad as Dr Frederick Frankenstein, grandson of the infamous Victor, who finds himself first invited to the late Baron's castle and then continuing his work of reanimating the dead with the help of houseboy Igor (a scene-stealing Marty Feldman).

Hitting the bases of Whale's masterpiece (not all of which are in Mary Shelley's novel) – grave-robbing, lightning-fuelled experiments, kind-hearted blind man (Gene Hackman!), innocent flower girl, torch-bearing lynch mob – Brooks is generous with one-liners, visual gags and ribald innuendo, but disciplined in style. So while much is made of the creature (Peter Boyle, sublime) having a monster phallus, *Young Frankenstein* works largely due to the elegance of Gerald Hirschfeld's period-specific monochrome photography and Dale Hennesy's impeccable production design.

The arrival of Zucker/Abrahams/Zucker (*Airplane!*, *Top Secret!*) led to Brooks' decline after the triple-whammy of *The Producers*, *Blazing Saddles* and *Young Frankenstein*. But his early work in the mad science of screen comedy still jolts like lightning. It's alive! **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT Flaunting great affection for its source material, Brooks' spoof will have you in stitches.

Oh, the innocence of those early Band Camp stories...

AMERICAN PIE 15

The flan-tastic four...

1999 ★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** 4K UHD + BD
EXTRAS ★★★★☆ Alternative cut, Commentary, Featurettes, Deleted scenes, Outtakes, Music video, Stills gallery, Booklet

Can it really be a quarter of a century since audiences enjoyed their first slice of *Pie*? Amazingly, more time has now passed since the first *American Pie* than in the 18-year gap that separated director Paul Weitz's comedy from that former bastion of high-school horniness, *Porky's* (1981).

Thankfully, *Pie* has aged slightly better than its less-than-illustrious predecessor. Although the primary focus of Adam Herz's raunchy script is the friendship between four teenage boys (Jason Biggs, Chris Klein, Thomas Ian Nicholas, Eddie Kaye Thomas) on a mission to lose their virginity by prom night, *Pie* at least makes some effort to flesh out the female characters and to foreground female pleasure as part of its sex-positive antics. That said, Shannon Elizabeth's foreign-exchange student does feel like a throwback to the days of *Porky's* and its seedy ilk.

The actual comedy is more of a mixed bag. There are plenty of laughs to be had at the expense of the boys' embarrassing capers, but some aspects are less intentionally cringe-inducing. Perhaps the biggest issue is the performances, with most of the youthful cast coming off as pretty stiff (fnar!). Thank heavens, then, for franchise MVP Eugene Levy as the dad of Biggs' Jim – he steals the movie out from under his young co-stars every time he appears on screen. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

THE VERDICT A sometimes sweet but occasionally bitter-tasting slice of raunchy teen-comedy nostalgia.

BRUISER 15

2000 ★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** BD, 4K UHD
EXTRAS ★★★★☆
Commentary, Featurettes, Soundtrack demo, Image gallery, Booklet

Released without fanfare during George A. Romero's wilderness years, this Jekyll and Hyde riff gets some long-awaited attention, courtesy of a limited-edition 4K UHD and Blu-ray with extensive extras. Jason Flemyng stars as a put-upon yuppie who wakes to find his face covered with a mask. Twisting his new-found anonymity to his advantage, he enacts violent revenge on his enemies. Uneven in tone and poorly acted, it plays like Romero's bitter response to the perceived indifference of the film industry. **MATT GLASBY**

WHO SAW HER DIE? 15

1972 ★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** BD
EXTRAS ★★★☆☆
Featurettes, Alt audio track

A moustachioed George Lazenby headlines this giallo by director Aldo Lado. The former Bond plays sculptor Franco Serpieri, tracking a killer through Venice as he investigates the mysterious death of his young daughter. Sharing a dead child and a foggy Venetian setting, this precedes *Don't Look Now* by a year, but faded into obscurity while Nicolas Roeg's film revelled in its infamy. A haunting score by Ennio Morricone elevates this uneven whodunnit, layering a chorus of tormented voices atop the evocative cinematography. **JOEL HARLEY**

THE SORCERERS 15

1967 ★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** BD
EXTRAS ★★★☆☆
Commentaries, Featurettes, Booklet

If youth is wasted on the young, then the old are hardly the best custodians for it either, according to this second feature from director Michael Reeves. While the set-up is as hokey as they come – a hip young man (Ian Ogilvy) becomes the unwitting plaything for an elderly hypnotist (Boris Karloff) and his embittered wife (Catherine Lacey) – the terrific cast bring real gravitas to the story's moral quandaries. Meanwhile, Reeves, who next made *Witchfinder General*, effortlessly evokes the faded glories of 'Swinging Sixties' London. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

MILDRED PIERCE 12

1945 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** 4K UHD
EXTRAS ★★★☆☆
Documentary, Featurettes, TV segment, Essay

Forget Damien Thorn and Rosemary's baby: when it comes to truly evil cinematic brats, not even the Antichrist can hold a candle to Veda Pierce (Ann Blyth), the spoiled, selfish and ultimately sociopathic daughter of Joan Crawford's Mildred in Michael Curtiz's blend of noir and melodrama. Upgrading Criterion's 2017 Blu-ray, this 4K UHD doesn't add any extras, but does succeed in bringing even more luminosity to the film's atmospheric, Oscar-nominated black-and-white photography. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

UNIVERSAL, 88 FILMS, POWERHOUSE, SPIRIT/CRITERION, SHAMELESS

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

No strings attached: *Farscape*'s cast, both human and handmade

CLASSIC TV
FARSCAPE

Muppets in space...

1999-2004 AVAILABLE ON BD, DIGITAL

Of all TV shows, *Farscape* was the one that influenced *Guardians [of the Galaxy]* the most,' announced filmmaker James Gunn on Twitter in 2016. It was a welcome acknowledgement of the sizeable debt his Marvel Studios blockbuster owed to one of the wildest, weirdest and most wonderful series to emerge from the 1990s sci-fi TV boom.

The first original show commissioned by the Sci-Fi Channel, *Farscape* was the brainchild of *Alien Nation* writer Rockne S. O'Bannon and the Jim Henson Company's Brian Henson, the latter looking to develop a series to showcase the different facets of what his company could do. The story the two creatives concocted saw US astronaut John Crichton (Ben Browder) accidentally catapulted across the universe into a sci-fi landscape unlike anything TV audiences had ever seen.

The antithesis of the militaristic set-ups of *Star Trek*, *Babylon 5*, et al, *Farscape* largely centred on a dysfunctional group of alien ex-convicts on the run from a paramilitary junta. Alongside more humanoid characters (including Claudia Black's Aeryn Sun and Anthony Simcoe's Ka D'Argo), a hallmark of the series was its use of puppets for many of its alien characters, including two of the core cast – the massive, multi-limbed Pilot and diminutive Nigel Farage lookalike Dominar Rygel XVI. 'The great thing about having [Henson's] creature shop at our disposal was it wasn't just actors with prosthetic wrinkles on their forehead,' remarks O'Bannon.

Farscape also railed against the sterile nature of other sci-fi shows of the era. 'We wanted a much more primitive energy,' says Henson. 'It was when rave parties were big, Burning Man, stuff like that... We used to say our emotions are dialled up to 12.' Not only did this feed into the show's complex characters and stories, it also allowed *Farscape* to have a sense of wild humour. Perhaps by virtue of being shot in Australia and left to do more or less its own thing by studio execs, the show was also unusually horny – ensuring *Farscape* frequently went where no TV space opera had gone before...

After four seasons, the Sci-Fi Channel pulled the plug on Crichton's galaxy-hopping (mis)adventures. But it wasn't quite over. O'Bannon and Henson had cheekily ended the show on a cliffhanger and fans eagerly took the bait, campaigning for a comeback. The following year the network capitulated, and the miniseries *The Peacekeeper Wars* gave this ambitious and unpredictable sci-fi show the send-off it deserved. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

REVENGING ANGEL
S3, 2001

If not the very best episode (S2's *The Way We Weren't* takes that honour), the hilarious *Revenging Angel* is *Farscape* at its most far-out. Accidentally injured by an enraged Ka D'Argo, a comatose Crichton battles his way back to consciousness through a pitch-perfect, Looney Tunes-inspired animated dreamworld, with himself as the Roadrunner and D'Argo doing his best Wile E. Coyote impression.

THE JIM HENSON COMPANY. NINE FILMS & TELEVISION PTY

FRESH SPINS

Toothy and clawed...

ALIEN: ROMULUS
★★★★★
Arguably, Benjamin Wallfisch's score does a sturdier job of gene-splicing homages and fresh horrors than *Romulus* itself. *The Chrysalis* is exemplary, mixing a piercing xenomorph theme with neo-liturgical awe. Raine's theme adds warmth, Andy's adds ambiguity, while variably eerie, brassy, spooked nods to Goldsmith, Horner and Streitenfeld are neatly embedded. And if the action cues lapse into generic electro-abrasive fodder, *The Offspring* is something new: dark, dissonant and properly alien.

DEADPOOL & WOLVERINE
★★★★★
Rob Simonsen strikes a smartly goofy/grandiose balance with his sure-footed MCU entry. The Deadpool theme is well-developed and malleable, moulded to match motifs from Beltrami, Silvestri and other multiverse forebears. Malign moodscapes and moggy miaows add menace and mirth, as needed, before *He's Not Gonna Make It* flexes hero pecs nicely. A separate song-track release boasts Green Day, NSYNC, *Greatest Show*('oh oh-oh-oh')*man* et al, while Madonna stands alone with a *Like a Prayer* remix EP.

Joseph Cotten and Alida Valli as Holly Martins and Anna Schmidt, to the tune of a zither

CLASSIC SOUNDTRACK
THE THIRD MAN

ANTON KARAS CLASSIC SOUNDTRACKS RECORDS

Film fans talk in reverent tones of directors who made one great feature and no more. Think Charles Laughton (*The Night of the Hunter*), Jean Vigo (*L'Atalante*)… Anton Karas is scoring's mic-drop equivalent, a man whose sole soundtrack made movie history: 75 years on, his work for 1949 Brit-noir *The Third Man* (currently back in cinemas) remains an indelible miracle of innovation and ingenuity.

The much-mythologised backstory is unusual in itself. In Vienna, English director Carol Reed used to visit a tavern where he discovered Karas playing an odd instrument – the zither. Since Reed already knew he didn't want orchestral plumage for his shadowy tale of post-war decay and corruption, he invited Karas to London, where the zitherist spent six-ish weeks scoring to Reed's moviola footage.

Using just one instrument, Karas crafted something wondrous, its integral significance signalled as the title theme unfolds over images of the zither's 40 strings. The tune is at once infectious, slippery and disconcertingly impish for noir-ish territory – though it goes on to suit the contradictions and evasions of Orson Welles' crooked Harry Lime rather nicely.

Duly, Karas uses the music as both ironic counterpoint and driving force. Reed was surprised how clean the zither sounded when recorded, so he had Karas play under a table – it helped capture the instrument's tangible edges, apparently. The rattling results can sound at one with clattering shoes on cobbled streets and the melancholia of doomed infatuation alike. Yet its skewed tonalities also evoke a world canted, like cinematographer Robert Krasker's off-kilter angles.

Meanwhile, the use of one fluent instrument and player created a congruency across the film, such that Karas' music casts long rhyming shadows from *Trap to Catch Harry* to *Harry's Funeral*. By the time of *Anna Walks Away*, the score's sinuous, cumulative power has stuck: sad or tense, jaunty or dark, it's unshakeable.

The main theme proved as much, selling enough copies to sire a trend for film cues released as singles and inspiring homages by artists from The Beatles to The Band and pop parodists The Lonely Island. Fans include Martin Scorsese and Spider-Verse innovator Daniel Pemberton, who described Karas' mix of range and immediacy as his 'Holy Grail'. *Better Call Saul* deployed the main theme deftly, auguring its lead's racketeering antics.

For Karas, *The Third Man* birthed a lucrative live career, playing to audiences including royalty and the Pope. Then he returned to Vienna, bought the tavern he used to gig in and played there: a nicely unique move from the man behind a supremely original score. **KEVIN HARLEY**

20TH CENTURY STUDIOS. MARVEL STUDIOS.ANAL

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

EXTRAS

PRINTS

BLACK WOMEN OF BOND POP ART

OUT 26 SEPTEMBER

It's 55 years since Sylvana Henriques became the first Black woman to star in a Bond movie (*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*). To celebrate, Art & Hue is launching a collection of prints detailing Henriques and her fellow 007 trailblazers: Trina Parks, Gloria Hendry, Grace Jones, Naomie Harris and Lashana Lynch. Get your money(penny) ready at artandhue.com.

COLLECTIBLES

HORROR TUBBZ

OUT NOW

This Halloween, scary-movie fans can get their cosplaying ducks in a row with first editions of Dracula, Frankenstein's Monster, the Creature from the Black Lagoon, Billy the Puppet and Michael Myers ('evil dives tonight', anyone?). There are also Tubbz of *Shaun of the Dead*'s Shaun (armed with cricket bat) and Zombie Ed (armed with PS controller). And last but not least (despite being two inches tall), we have Mini Tubbz of *Beetlejuice*, Scarred Chucky and *Gremlins*' Stripe. Gather your army of bath-ness at tubbz.com.

LEGO, RAVENSBURGER, ART & HUE, NUMSKULL

TOY/COLLECTIBLE

LEGO THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS SET

OUT NOW

Even Jack Skellington can see what this is: a loving Lego-fication of three locations from Henry Selick's stop-motion stunner: Spiral Hill, Halloween Town Hall and - oh, we can't believe our eyes - Jack's house. Designed by UK Lego lover Simon Scott (as part of the construction-toy company's Ideas programme), the 2,193-piece set includes eight minifigures (including a not-so-mini Mayor) and eerily exact details (gravestones, 'Days to Xmas' sign, walking bathtub). Fill up the empty place inside of you at lego.com.

TOY

STAR WARS GRAVITRAX DEATH STAR SET

OUT NOW

Forget the trench run: it's time for a marble run with this first licensed edition of the interactive GraviTrax system. Look at the size of this thing: an 80cm (diameter) Death Star base on which you can build epic marble runs using more than 200 components, including character-etched marbles, weapons and ships. And it's all compatible with other GraviTrax sets and expansions, so there's no limit to your Empire-building. Get the ball rolling at ravensburger.co.uk. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**

2 MORE

Golden Hollywood and groan-worthy gags...

THE REAL BOGIE & BACALL

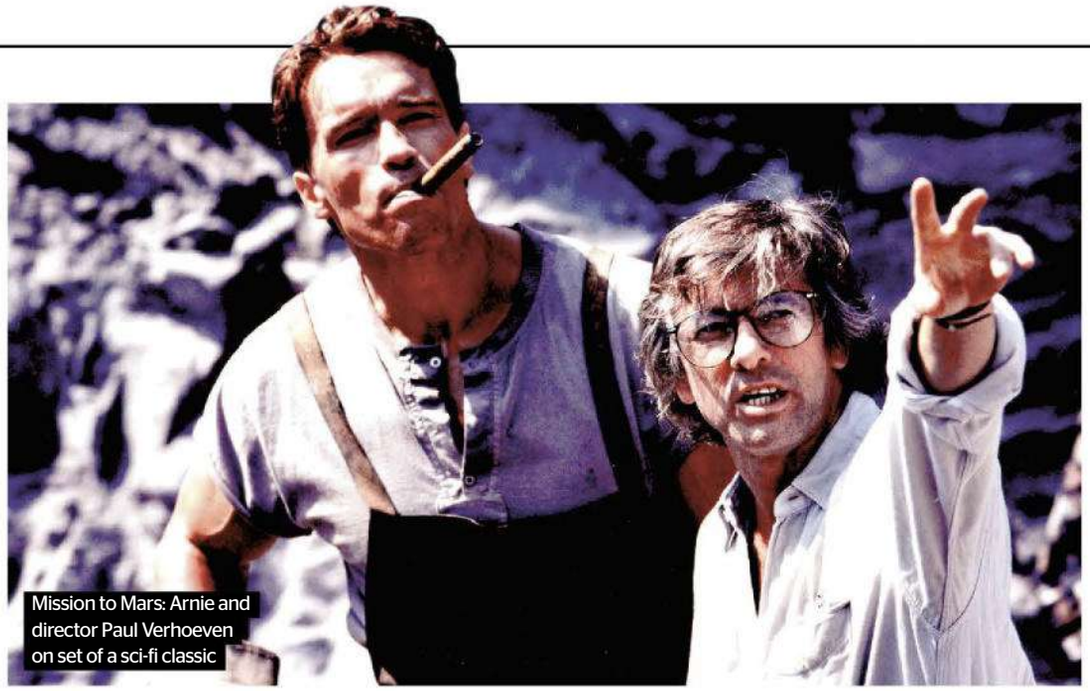
★★★☆☆

'We're going to have a lot of fun together!' Humphrey Bogart reportedly said to ingénue Lauren Bacall as they prepared to film 1944's *To Have and Have Not*. And so they did, over the course of what became one of the great Hollywood romances, despite his alcoholic binges and their 25-year age gap. With only 150 pages of text, author Catherine Curzon's joint biog is patently too slim to do the relationship full justice. It's a perfectly serviceable precis, though, that leaves behind an alluring whiff of old-school glamour. **NEIL SMITH**

STAR WARS DAD JOKES

★★★☆☆

'How does Wicket get back to his village? Ewoks.' Believe it or not, that's one of the subtler examples of wordplay (or War-dplay, if you will) in Kelly Knox's purposefully pun-ful journey to the laugh side (lordy, it's catching...). Pocket-sized and copy-lite (two gags per page max, plus a handful of illos, including a nice one of Yoda levitating a sheep), it feels tailor-made for gift-seeking impulse buyers to grab while queuing in their local card shop. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**



Mission to Mars: Arnie and director Paul Verhoeven on set of a sci-fi classic

©2024 STUDIOCANAL. PAUL VERHOEVEN

BOOKS

TOTAL RECALL: THE OFFICIAL STORY OF THE FILM

★★★★☆ **SIMON BRAUND** TITAN BOOKS

They don't make Sphinxes like they used to!' 'It's gonna be fun to play God!' 'Is the Pope Martian?' Three lines there that thankfully didn't make it into the final script for *Total Recall*, Paul Verhoeven's 1990 blockbuster about implanted memories, revolting mutants and getting one's ass to Mars.

Mutant camels were another thing jettisoned during its tortuous journey to the screen, as were Richard Dreyfuss, William Hurt, Patrick Swayze and director David Cronenberg. Indeed, if this lavishly illustrated retrospective tells us anything, it's that it's a wonder *TR* made it to cinemas at all, let alone become a box-office hit.

As far as Arnold Schwarzenegger was concerned, however, this adaptation of a 1966 Philip K. Dick short story always had the makings of a *Terminator*-sized smash. So much so, indeed, he had Carolco's Andrew G. Vajna snap up the rights and personally persuaded Verhoeven to get on board. When the film's Mexican shoot was beset by problems, it was Arnie who bolstered everyone's morale. (At one party, he could be found firing a water pistol from beneath a table.) It was also the Austrian Oak who stepped in at the last hour to salvage its dull marketing plan. Full of concept art, on-set photos and Verhoeven's storyboards, Braund's book is a comprehensive companion to a sci-fi favourite. **NEIL SMITH**

DC CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

★★★★☆

NICK JONES, STEPHEN WIACEK DK

From 40s serials through to the DCEU's end, this well-crafted tome charts the production histories of DC properties on the big screen. There's also a compelling exploration of how the company itself has evolved in tandem with the movies. The lesser-known likes of *Steel* and both Swamp Thing films are given decent space, though it's a shame that the animated DC features are relegated to sidebar mentions rather than proper entries. **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

THE DE PALMA DECADE

★★★★☆

LAURENT BOUZEREAU

RUNNING PRESS

Filmmaker and author Bouzereau unpacks his, ahem, obsession with Brian De Palma, starting with the formative years of the director's career. Seven films are hand-picked for analysis, from *Sisters* (1972) to *Blow Out* (1981). Along the way, three key themes are identified and carefully applied – taking 'The Split,' for example, to mean both twin sisters and De Palma's signature use of the split diopter lens. A stylish and deeply personal exploration of the auteur's work. **JOEL HARLEY**

MARVEL STUDIOS: 100 OBJECTS

★★★★☆

TRACEY MILLER-ZARNEKE DK

Ant-Man's suit, Hawkeye's bow, *Awesome Mix Vol. 2*... This colourful guide to MCU paraphernalia does what you'd expect, schooling readers in the context and importance of these artefacts. Divided into themed sections, it gives some biggies (the Tesseract, the Infinity Gauntlet) extra words, but mostly keeps things brisk. Packed with finer details (Nick Fury's pass shows his middle name is Joseph), it's an object of desire for the Marvel faithful. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

CHRONICLE, DK, RUNNING PRESS, TITAN, WHITE OWL

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

TOTAL FILM BUFF

CINEMA CELEBRATED AND DEBATED. BOOSTING YOUR MOVIE GENIUS TO SUPERHERO LEVELS...

THIS MONTH DARK MATTER'S PARALLEL TIMELINES

IS IT BOLLOCKS?

Film Buff investigates the facts behind outlandish movie plots.

Q In Apple TV+ show *Dark Matter*, a scientist swaps places with a version of himself from an alternate reality. Pure fiction or sci-fact?

A Professor Jim Al-Khalili CBE FRS, theoretical physicist, author and broadcaster says...

The premise of *Dark Matter* is somewhat similar to the one in *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once*, in the sense that it explores the idea of the quantum multiverse. Now, here is where a bit of an explainer is required. Essentially, there are two types of multiverse theories that appear in modern physics, and it's useful not to confuse them.

The first is the idea of a cosmological multiverse, which is hypothesised to exist in order to explain how come our universe is so finely tuned to give rise to the complex structure we have, like stars, planets, life, and Apple TV+. If ours is just one of a huge number of bubble universes floating in a higher dimension, forever disconnected from each other, then there is no surprise that our universe has the properties it does; it is just the lottery winner. Most of the other universes would be very different. It is not that they contain other copies of you, but more likely galaxies and stars never even formed in them.

The second type of multiverse – on which *Dark Matter* is based – is the quantum multiverse. Physicists refer to this idea as 'Everettian many-worlds' theory and it is just one of several theories that we appeal to in order to explain the weird and counterintuitive nature of the subatomic quantum realm. According to many-worlds theory, every time the universe is faced with a choice of options – should an atom go left or right – our entire reality splits into two (or more, depending on options available). It sounds quite crazy, and yet it works! Basically, it's *Sliding Doors* on the microscale where every eventuality from an infinite list of possibilities is realised in some reality/universe.

So what about the science in *Dark Matter*? Well, to my mind – and I have not spoken to the creators or the quantum physics experts they no doubt listened to (and partly ignored) – I see it as conflating two quantum ideas: one is the many worlds interpretation and the other is the idea that our consciousness can affect the nature of reality, or that our conscious minds can exist in a quantum superposition (which basically means a combination of all the different options that lead to different universes). The former idea could turn out to be correct, but I am afraid the latter is outright woo. I should say that there are controversial theories out there about the quantum nature of consciousness, but they are extremely speculative (more than the idea of an infinity of parallel universes, Jim? I hear you ask).

Well, in a way it doesn't really matter. This series is science-fiction and, as I always say, the clue is in the word 'fiction'.

VERDICT MOSTLY BOLLOCKS

ALTERNATIVE BOX OFFICE

The biggest movies... WITH PENGUIN-Y TITLES

01	**OZ THE GREAT AND POWERFUL** 2013	$493.3M
02	**THE EMPEROR'S NEW GROOVE** 2000	$169.7M
03	**CHOCOLAT** 2000	$152.7M
04	**THREE KINGS** 1999	$107.8M
05	**BOOK CLUB** 2018	$104.4M
06	**BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD** 2012	$21.1M
07	**FLIPPER** 1996	$20.1M
08	**GO FISH** 1994	$2.4M
09	**COLD IN JULY** 2014	$1.5M
10	**WHITE BIRD IN A BLIZZARD** 2014	$0.5M

ON LOCATION REEL SPOTS BEHIND THE CAMERA

WHAT? The resplendent English home of the man who proposes to Sylvia, aka Mary's mom, in *Three Men and a Little Lady*. Missing their gals, the titular guys descend.
WHERE? Broughton Castle, near Banbury, Oxfordshire
GO? The manor house, gardens (and tearoom!) are open much of the year, and available for private bookings. Also features in *Shakespeare in Love* and *The Madness of King George*.

ALAMY, DISNEY

Want us to investigate if a movie scenario is bollocks or snapped yourself at a film location? Contact us at totalfilm@futurenet.com

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

10 OF THE BEST

FOURTH-WALL BREAKERS

Movies that smash it...

1 A CLOCKWORK ORANGE

Stanley Kubrick opens his ultra-stylised tale of gang warfare, state violence and quashed free will with Alex DeLarge (Malcolm McDowell) leering into the camera. Throughout, his gleeful narration cajoles and befriends us. Viddy well, my droogs. Viddy well.

2 FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF

'Life moves pretty fast,' says Ferris (Matthew Broderick). 'If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.' The teen truant's charming straight-to-camera chats mean we're happy to play hooky with him.

3 ANNIE HALL

When Alvy (Woody Allen) and Annie (Diane Keaton) are in a cinema queue, a pompous academic spouts off about film, quoting media scholar Marshall McLuhan. Alvy complains to us, the viewer, then rustles up McLuhan himself to correct the overbearing asshat.

4 WAYNE'S WORLD

This party-time comedy is made all the more excellent by lovable slackers Wayne and Garth (Mike Myers, Dana Carvey) constantly breaking the fourth wall, whether it's to shoot the breeze, give us a grinning two-thumbs-up or sell Pizza Hut. Good call.

5 PSYCHO

Ending a movie with a character looking into the camera is overused these days, but it was chilling when *Psycho* did it. Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) leers maniacally from beneath his beetled brow as a skull is superimposed over his face. He *will* kill again...

6 MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL

This Arthurian epic ends abruptly as an army of knights prepares to assault a castle: cop cars screech into frame and the players are arrested. Inspired lunacy prompted by the Pythons' production running out of money IRL.

7 FUNNY GAMES

Both the Austrian and US versions of Michael Haneke's home-invasion movie have one of the killers grab a TV remote and rewind the action when the family fight back. The point? There's no escape, and to ask viewers why we see violence as entertainment.

8 ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE

'This never happened to the other fella,' quips George Lazenby's Bond after the woman he's rescued drives off and leaves him. 'It was the first time we actually spoofed ourselves in the series,' said screenwriter Richard Maibaum.

9 KISS KISS BANG BANG

Shane Black's neo-noir concludes with Harry (Robert Downey Jr.) yakking directly to the audience. 'This movie is about friendship,' he says, before Gay Perry (Val Kilmer) cuts in: 'To all you good people in the Midwest, sorry we said "fuck" so much.'

10 WES CRAVEN'S NEW NIGHTMARE

Craven gave us meta-mayhem g(al)ore before *Scream*. Actors from the A Nightmare on Elm Street series are stalked by the *real* Freddy Krueger. Turns out he didn't like the first six movies.

JAMIE GRAHAM

Did we miss something? Let us know on @totalfilm

ARTIFICIAL EYE. EON. NEW LINE CINEMA. PARAMOUNT. SONY. UNITED ARTISTS. WARNER BROS.

REEL ESTATE

FOR SALE This remote cottage is nestled deep in the woods, far from civilisation. Comprised of a kitchen, bathroom, three bedrooms and a spacious living room replete with trapdoor leading to the cellar, the cottage also comes with a toolshed nearby and a stone well next to a rusted Oldsmobile that lends character to the property. The previous owners have left a strange book in the cellar, along with a shotgun. The perfect property for anyone who wants to get away from the hustle and bustle of it all, but is also open to the sudden arrival of uninvited guests.

HINDSIGHT CORNER

RYAN REYNOLDS

ON THE LEAKED *DEADPOOL* TEST FOOTAGE

January 2016

'It took 11 years. We made a taster, but that sat on the shelf for four years until someone leaked it on the web, and then within 24 hours it got the green light. I tried to make it happen for all that time, but the fans got it made.'

July 2024

'I mean, I might have provided an assist…'

FLOP CULTURE

Saoirse Ronan wowed as young murder victim Susie

THE LOVELY BONES

Peter Jackson's 2009 adaptation of Alice Sebold's novel left audiences divided. Was it too torn at the core to ever work?

Why it was a good idea (on paper)

From Middle-earth (via Skull Island) to the 'In-Between', Jackson's adaptation promised to redirect the emotional grandeur of *Rings/Kong* back towards his earlier, leaner highs. *Heavenly Creatures* was a reference point for his 2009 tale of murder and other worlds, with Saoirse Ronan as the Winslet-grade rising star.

What went wrong?

If *The Lovely Bones* splintered between sentiment/horror on-screen, its route there was equally fractured. Scottish free-thinker Lynne Ramsay (*Ratcatcher*) optioned the book after reading an incomplete proof, planning a 'dark and ominous' take. When the completed novel emerged, Ramsay found the second half 'cheesy'. It was a hit, however, and Hollywood's involvement demanded the film stick to the book. Ramsay departed and Jackson arrived, aiming to mould PG-13 material from a tale of unspeakable trauma. In fairness, Jackson recognised that a film about a 14-year-old girl's murder could make for a 'difficult' watch. Casting wobbles (Ryan Gosling departed) compounded the film's issues, while a US release date shift from March to December hardly helped: aiming for awards season, distributors blundered onto *Avatar*'s patch. Meanwhile, marketing faced the problem of promoting a mix of afterlife fantasy, crime story and domestic tragedy. Reviews suggested Jackson failed to resolve the tonal contrasts, a problem exacerbated by a comic-relief turn from Susan Sarandon that seemed to belong in another film.

Redeeming feature

Ronan and co-star Stanley Tucci (as the murderer next door) banked due awards noms for their considered, committed leads.

What happened next?

Jackson's Tintin movie stalled before he embraced pipe-weed home comforts and iffy stylistic choices – 48fps – for the Hobbit trilogy. Rightfully, Ronan rocketed to great heights.

Should it be remade?

No, but the Ramsay version is one of cinema's great what-ifs. Just imagine a world where such unmade projects exist. **KEVIN HARLEY**

BUDGET	BOX OFFICE	AWARDS	TF STAR RATING	ROTTEN TOMATOES
$65m	$93.6m	3	★★★½	31%

ALAMY, 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS/MARVEL STUDIOS

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

IS IT JUST ME?

'Officers! You can't arrest me for making a disappointing sequel!'

IS IT JUST ME OR ARE BELATED SEQUELS RARELY WORTH THE WAIT?

NEIL SMITH

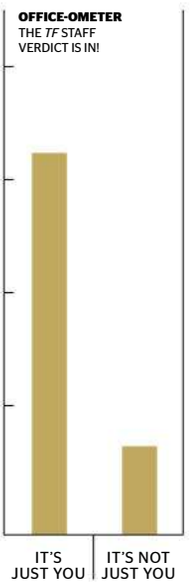
How long is too long to wait for a sequel? It's a topic I've been pondering in the wake of two recent releases that took a glacially long time to reach us. The first was *Beverly Hills Cop: Axel F*, a comeback for Eddie Murphy's fish-out-of-water lawman whose arrival on Netflix came 30 years on from franchise nadir *Beverly Hills Cop III*. The second was *Twisters*, not so much a follow-up to the 1996 original as an even windier upgrade.

I can't say I'd been pining for Murphy's Axel Foley, any more than I'd been craving a return to Oklahoma's Tornado Alley. But I dutifully saw *Twisters* and *Axel F* anyway, quietly nursing the hope that they'd deliver at least a fraction of the feels Jan de Bont's original and the first *Cop* had given me. The former left me bemused, director Lee Isaac Chung having apparently decided that what was wanted this time around was more science, no flying cattle and lashings of survivor guilt. The latter just made me sad, Mark Molloy's exercise in listlessness being less a throwback to the action comedies of yesteryear than a grim reminder that the sands of time flow in one direction.

It's a simple equation, really. The more belated a sequel is the more expectations it has to satisfy, making it exponentially less likely it will hit the jackpot. The rare movies that do – *Blade Runner 2049*, for example, or *Top Gun: Maverick* – succeed because they honour their origins *and* offer something fresh to a new generation. The more common scenario is the unbidden afterthought overly dependent on dewy-eyed nostalgia: a sorry subset where you'll find such misfires as *The Matrix Resurrections*, *Independence Day: Resurgence* and Indys 4 and 5.

Time will tell where *Gladiator II*, *Shrek 5* and *28 Years Later* figure in this brutally binary metric, not to mention the *Lethal* finale Mel Gibson plans to act in and direct. When the gaps between sequels start being measured in decades, though, perhaps that's a sign it's finally time to put the cash cow out to pasture. Or is it just me?

Share your reaction at www.gamesradar.com/totalfilm or on Facebook and Twitter.



ALAMY, MELINDA SUE GORDON/NETFLIX

LAST TIME DID BLOCKBUSTERS PEAK WITH *PIRATES*?

MAREK BALICKÝ
It's just you, bro. [Blockbusters peaked] with *Dr. No*.

HAIKU PNE
Blockbusters peaked in the 80s.

MARK BOISVERT
If blockbusters did peak, it definitely was *not* during the Star Wars prequels.

PSYCH_SQUIRREL
Pirates of the Caribbean sucked.

There will always be predominantly rubbish blockbusters and the odd great one.

ANTOINE MAILLARD
Blockbusters are in a bad situation.

GOLDEN GRAHAMS

Editor-at-Large Jamie Graham unearths underrated classics...

THIS MONTH
The Fallout

It's a mystery to me how a film that stars Jenna Ortega (*Scream*, *Wednesday*) and that won a Grand Jury Award at SXSW in 2021 has not been released in the UK. But here, at the time of writing, we are.

I say 'at the time of writing' because I'm hoping that's changed by the time you read this, or will do soon after. Interviewing writer/director Megan Park in July for her sophomore feature, *My Old Ass* (see page 89 for the review), I pointed out that her debut is maddeningly unavailable in the UK, and she promised to look into it. That, added to Ortega starring in *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* to continue her meteoric ascent, gives me hope. And hey, if all else fails you can always do what I did and order in the Region 1 disc. I promise you, it's worth the investment.

The Fallout is a school-shooting film that, as the title suggests, focuses on the aftermath. It begins with teen Vada (Ortega), at once bookish and alternative, hanging with gay best friend Nick (Will Ropp) and younger sister Amelia (Lumi Pollack). Vada's contentedly 'low-key', as she puts it, but that all changes when gunshots ring out in the school. In the girls' bathroom at the time, Vada finds herself huddled in a stall with Mia (Maddie Ziegler), and they're soon joined by Quinton (Niles Fitch), who arrives covered in his brother's blood. Together the trio balance on the loo to hide their feet in case the shooter enters.

Off camera, the shooter, a classmate, is caught by police, and the film follows Vada in the weeks that follow, her 'low-key' demeanour now a mixture of grief, numbness and survivor's guilt. Retreating from her parents (Julie Bowen, John Ortiz), sister and Nick, whose own method of coping is to become a vocal campaigner, she spends an increasing amount of time with Mia, who reveals herself to be more than the beautiful dancer with 80,000 followers on Insta that Vada had previously observed from the sidelines.

Park's background as a teen actor, and her consequent desire to include her exemplary Gen Z cast and have them translate *The Fallout*'s dialogue into their own words, pays dividends. This is a staggeringly accomplished debut, sensitive and authentic at every turn. Instead of offering smart-ass irony, quote-friendly lingo and glib answers, it allows Vada to fumble and stumble: there's no judgement, sensationalism or salacious intent as Vada experiments with alcohol, drugs and sex, only a quiet empathy that moved this hardened hack to tears. And while a couple of moments of tension-releasing comedy don't quite land, Vada taking E at school is one of the film's highlights, communicating her pain even as it rivals DiCaprio's Quaalude set piece in *The Wolf of Wall Street* for guffaws.

Park says she made *The Fallout* to 'hopefully inspire change', a lofty ideal that the NRA and avaricious politicians simply will not countenance. But Park's other objective – 'to use my voice to make someone feel less alone' – is vitally important. It's OK to not be OK, says *The Fallout*, words that will chime not just with teenagers directly affected by the school-shooting epidemic in America, but with teens, and people of all ages, everywhere.

JAMIE WILL RETURN NEXT ISSUE...
FOR MORE RECOMMENDATIONS, FOLLOW @JAMIE_GRAHAM9 ON X/TWITTER

See this if you liked...

THE BREAKFAST CLUB 1985
'The world is an imperfect place.' Teens on detention work through their shit.

SHOW ME LOVE 1998
Lukas Moodysson's affecting drama watches closely as two lonely girls fall in love in small-town Sweden.

DONNIE DARKO 2001
Mental-health issues, alienation and emotion lie beneath the surreal sci-fi mystery in Richard Kelly's debut.

EIGHTH GRADE 2018
A shy teenage girl tries to navigate the daily cringe of high school in Bo Burnham's painfully honest debut.

ONE MORE...
MASS 2021
The parents of a shooter meet the parents of a victim in an effort to understand and move forward.

ALAMY

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

INSTANT EXPERT

SHARON STONE

A superstar, basically...

AUTEURED IMAGES

Born in 1958 in Pennsylvania, Stone parlayed a tough, traumatic childhood into a successful modelling career. Moving into acting, she scored early roles in Woody Allen's *Stardust Memories* (1980) and Wes Craven's *Deadly Blessing* (1981), but always dreamed of being good enough to go toe to toe with Robert De Niro (watch this space…). After an eye-catching role in Paul Verhoeven's *Total Recall* (1990), she went stratospheric with the director's next film…

SEIZING THE MOMENT

Stone's agent reportedly stole her the script for Verhoeven's erotic thriller *Basic Instinct* (1992), pestering the production team to get her an audition as crime novelist/possible killer Catherine Tramell. She nailed it – and the movie, which earned her a Golden Globe nomination and became a worldwide smash. A controversial upskirt shot was included without her consent, but the movie's success/infamy cemented her as Hollywood's fave femme fatale.

WINNING BIG

After a string of duds (1993's *Sliver*, 1994's *Intersection* and *The Specialist*) plus Sam Raimi's quirky *The Quick and the Dead* (1995), Stone hit the jackpot again with Martin Scorsese's *Casino* (1995). Playing Ginger McKenna, the vivacious wife of De Niro's Mob gambling expert Ace Rothstein, she fulfilled that early dream, scoring a Golden Globe plus the film's only Academy Award nomination. 'That was the apex for me,' she told *The Guardian*.

BODY OF WORK

'I came into this world looking like a Barbie, so it's complicated for people to allow me the opportunity to be anything else,' she explained to *Variety*. In the face of typecasting, Stone has always embraced her physicality, pushing for raunchier sex scenes in *Basic Instinct 2* (2006) and posing nude, aged 58, in *Harper's Bazaar*. 'If people want to think I'm a sex symbol, it's like yeah, think it up!' she told Oprah.

FIGHTING BACK

At the height of her fame in 2001, Stone suffered a stroke followed by a brain haemorrhage. Although she recovered, she believes her Hollywood career did not. On top of her successful TV work (see Soderbergh's *Mosaic*, 2017) and being a single mother to three boys, she paints, write songs and became a Nobel Peace Summit laureate for her activism. As she wrote in her 2021 autobiography: 'When a door closes, I have to open another one.'

MATT GLASBY

KEY MOVIES

TOTAL RECALL 1990

★★★★★

A supporting role to remember, convincingly kicking Arnie's ass and earning the nickname 'The Female Terminator'.

BASIC INSTINCT 1992

★★★★☆

Stone slays as a bisexual badass 'as tough and smooth as the white silk scarf she wore' (the star's own words).

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD 1995

★★★★☆

Impressing as a deadly gunslinger, Stone also co-produced, handpicking Raimi, Crowe and a young DiCaprio.

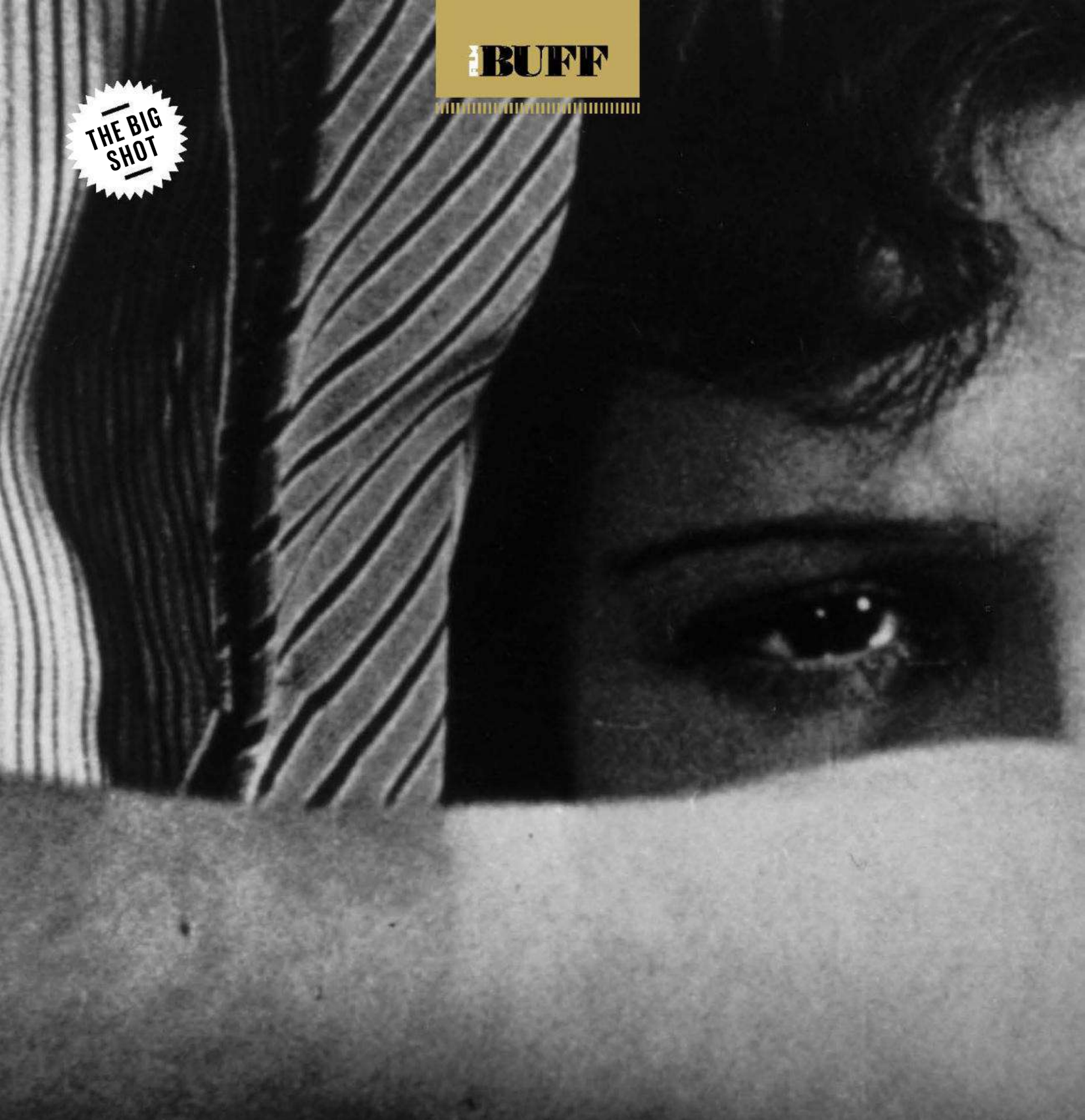
CASINO 1995

★★★★★

Stealing a movie from Robert De Niro and Joe Pesci is some feat. Stone called Martin Scorsese 'the greatest director of my life'.

COLUMBIA TRISTAR, ENTERTAINMENT, FINAL CUT, HBO, SONY, STUDIOCANAL, UNIVERSAL, VERTIGO

THE BIG SHOT



UN CHIEN ANDALOU'S SLICED EYEBALL

Blink and you'll miss it. Don't blink and you'll be wincing for hours. The cut that changed cinema, that defined an artistic movement, that caused 'several miscarriages' in the audience at the time, only lasts a split second.

Luis Buñuel sharpens a razor blade. He looks up at the clouds moving across the moon. He brings the blade to the eye of Simone Mareuil; the clouds cut the moon and the blade cuts the eyeball, leaking a bubble of jelly.

As cinematic metaphors go, it's hard to find a more direct engagement with the act of seeing and looking and cutting than the opening shots of Buñuel's 1929 silent debut, yet nothing could have been further from his intention. 'Nothing, in the film, symbolises anything,' he said, calling *Un Chien Andalou* 'no more than a desperate, impassioned call for murder'.

Then a rising star of André Breton's surrealist group alongside his co-writer, Salvador Dalí, Buñuel's aim was to shock the Paris art world out of its obsession with

ALAMY

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

reason and beauty. Cue the eyeball slice, and cue 20 subsequent minutes of deliberately absurd visuals including a human hand that hatches ants, an armpit that turns into a sea urchin, and a man dragging a piano full of dead donkeys.

No image stings like the eyeball slice, though – an effect Buñuel achieved by cutting into a dead calf (with the fur bleached to look like human skin) and by mastering the art of the quick edit to suggest something far worse. Beyond the shock, though, and despite whatever Buñuel said at the time, the shot did hold a deeper meaning.

Coming to the director in a dream, the sequence was an attempt to explore the then new ideas of free association; to build a film entirely around the subconscious. Made at a time when Europe was struggling to make sense of the horrors of the early 20th century, *Un Chien Andalou* was an antidote to real madness – a weapon in a cultural revolution designed to remake reality itself.

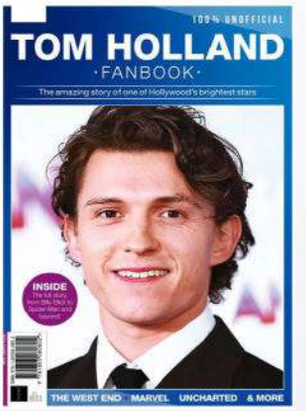
It didn't work. When he held the premiere in Paris, Buñuel was so ready for a terrible reception that he filled his pockets with stones, ready to fight back against the riot he was about to start. Instead, the film was a huge success. The reports of miscarriages were lies (early marketing at its best/worst), and only a handful of complaints were filed against the cinema showing it.

Almost 100 years later the influence is still being felt. Dream sequences all owe a debt. Independent film shaped itself in its wake. Buñuel's editing made horror what it is today. The Pixies even made a song about it. Yet still the original shot lingers – cinema has never been as eye-opening. **PAUL BRADSHAW**

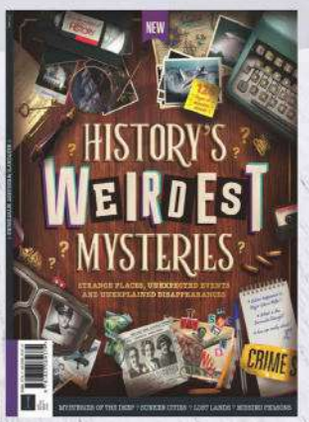
magazinesdirect.com

GET THE POPCORN READY!

If you're into TV shows or movies, you've come to the right place. Stay in the know about the latest Hollywood movies with or browse for your next binge-watching session.



YOU MAY ALSO LIKE



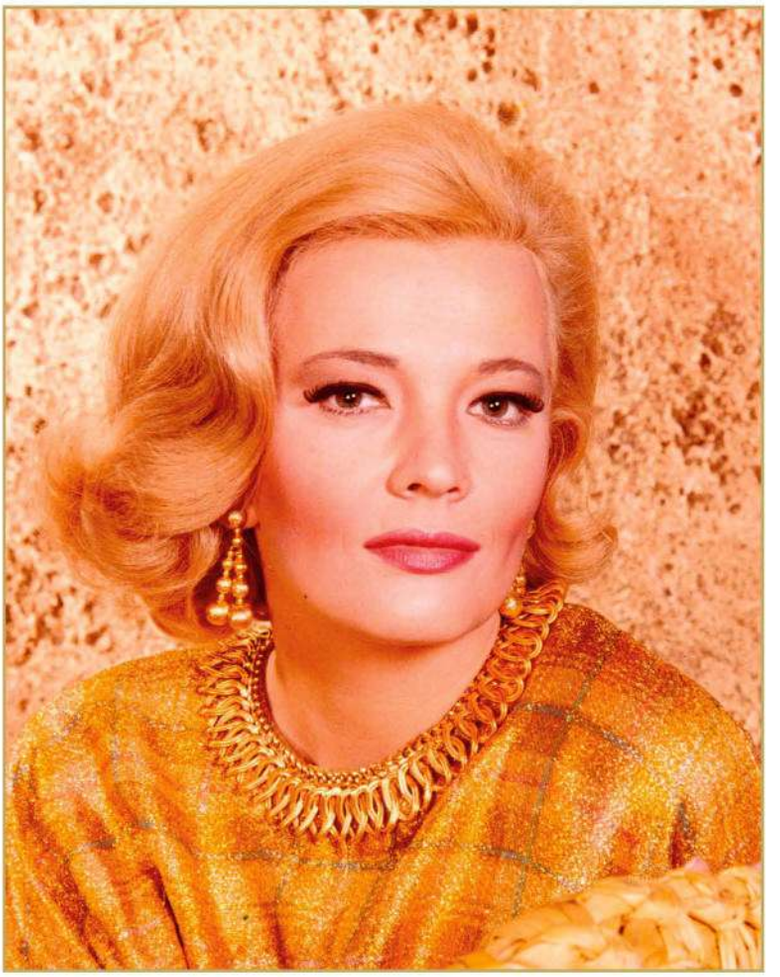
See the entire range online at

www.magazinesdirect.com/watch

or scan the QR code to find out more

CULT CLASSICS | FAN PACKS | GREATEST FILMS | HORROR | SCI-FI RETRO | SUPERHERO | TV | SATTELITE | STREAMING PLATFORMS

1930-2024



GENA ROWLANDS

I like difficult roles,' said Gena Rowlands. No kidding. A stage, TV and film actor whose career spanned more than six decades, Rowlands will be most remembered for the series of coruscating dramas she made with her first husband, actor-turned-director John Cassavetes, between 1968 and 1984.

Born Virginia Cathryn 'Gena' Rowlands in Madison, Wisconsin in 1930, she met Cassavetes at New York's American Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1953. They married within a year, and she played a small role in his third directorial effort, *A Child is Waiting* (1963). But it was playing a sex worker fielding a series of depressed, lonely men in Cassavetes' marital breakdown drama *Faces* (1968) that served as a spotlight for her detailed, emotionally intelligent work. Becoming Cassavetes' partner on screen as in life, she starred in *Minnie and Moskowitz* (1971), *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974), *Opening Night* (1977), *Gloria* (1980) and *Love Streams* (1984), movies that dealt with familial disintegration and destructive romance, addiction and mental illness. In all of these pictures, Rowlands was incandescent in her vehemence and vulnerability.

Rowlands had a career before and after Cassavetes, who died in 1989, and worked with several auteurs including William Friedkin (*The Brink's Job*, 1978), Paul Schrader (*Light of Day*, 1987), Woody Allen (*Another Woman*, 1988), Jim Jarmusch (*Night on Earth*, 1991) and Terence Davies (*The Neon Bible*, 1995). Many mainstream viewers will know her best as the old lady who's read to in the retirement home in *The Notebook* (2004), a romantic tearjerker directed by her son, Nick Cassavetes, who she had previously acted for in *Unhook the Stars* (1996) and *She's So Lovely* (1997). She also starred in her daughter Zoe R. Cassavetes' feature debut, *Broken English* (2007).

Growing up, Rowlands adored Bette Davis ('She was tough… I like that') and her own onscreen fierceness was reminiscent of Davis and such other golden-age heroines as Marlene Dietrich, Barbara Stanwyck and Katharine Hepburn. But working in independent cinema in the 60s and 70s, as restrictions loosened, allowed her to take it further. She could certainly be messier. 'I drew a lot from myself,' she said of portraying a breakdown in *A Woman Under the Influence*. 'I'm a little crazy – we all are – and sometimes I let things go.'

Rowlands won two Golden Globes and three Emmys. She was twice nominated for the Best Actress Oscar – for *Woman...* and *Gloria*, in which she plays a gangster's moll on the lam with a six-year-old boy – and received an Honorary Academy Award in 2015. She is survived by Zoe and Nick and her third actor-director child, Alexandra Cassavetes, and by her second husband Robert Forrest, who she married in 2012. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

GETTY

THE *TF* BRAIN

FRANKENSTEIN

It's alive! It's alive! Our monster quiz is alive!

EASY

1 Who played the Monster in the seminal 1931 film version of *Frankenstein*?
2 Kevin James voiced the Monster in three instalments of which animated franchise?
3 *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) was the first Franken-movie to be made by which production company?
4 Who stars in both the title role and as author Mary Shelley in *Bride of Frankenstein*?
5 Oscar Isaac is set to star as Victor Frankenstein for which Oscar-winning director?

MEDIUM

1 To date, what is the highest-grossing film with the word 'Frankenstein' in the title?
2 Complete the *Lisa Frankenstein* tagline: 'If you can't meet your perfect boyfriend ____ ____'
3 Name the vampire-themed follow-up to Paul Morrissey's *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1973).
4 Which role connects John Cusack, Daniel Radcliffe and Kevin J. O'Connor?
5 Which 70s Spanish classic features a young girl obsessed with 1931's *Frankenstein*?

HARD

1 In which year was Mary Shelley's source novel first published?
2 How many years separate Tim Burton's short *Frankenweenie* and its feature-length remake?
3 *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990) was the last feature directed by which filmmaker?
4 The 1995 novel *Father of Frankenstein* was adapted as which movie?
5 Samuel West as Victor, Shuler Hensley as the Monster… Name the movie.

DISNEY, SONY, UNIVERSAL

ANSWERS: EASY – 1. BORIS KARLOFF. 2. HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA. 3. HAMMER FILMS. 4. ELSA LANCHESTER. 5. GUILLERMO DEL TORO **MEDIUM** – 1. *MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN*. 2. 'MAKE HIM'. 3. *BLOOD FOR DRACULA*. 4. IGOR. 5. *THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE* **HARD** – 1. 1818. 2. 28 (1984/2012). 3. ROGER CORMAN. 4. *GODS AND MONSTERS*. 5. *VAN HELSING*

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

NAME THE FRAME

Can you guess these eight movies featuring penguins?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

ANSWERS: 1. *MR POPPER'S PENGUINS*. 2. *FIGHT CLUB*. 3. *SURF'S UP*. 4. *MARY POPPINS*. 5. *MADAGASCAR: ESCAPE 2 AFRICA*. 6. *BATMAN RETURNS*. 7. *ODDBALL*. 8. *HAPPY FEET*

Dialogue

Mail, rants, theories etc.

HAVE YOUR SAY
TOTALFILM.COM
VIDEOS · REVIEWS · TRAILERS · NEWS

@ totalfilm.com twitter.com/totalfilm facebook.com/totalfilm totalfilm@futurenet.com

★ STAR LETTER

I've (finally!) seen *Deadpool & Wolverine*, and I have to say I absolutely loved it. Seeing those two beloved characters together with all the cameos and fan service was pure fun.

I'll never suffer from superhero fatigue, but I can understand others do, because of one particular factor: every villain being hellbent on mass destruction. It's boring. The great thing about comic-book characters is their capabilities. Obviously a decent story is important, but seeing powers and abilities used in clever ways should also be paramount, in my opinion. More villains just messing with the heroes, or scheming for their personal gain on a smaller scale would be most welcome.

PETER RENDER, VIA EMAIL

If real-life villains could also dial it down a bit that'd be nice, too. But yes, might be refreshing to see, say, Thanos giving up on the Infinity Stones and irksomely rearranging the rockery in the Avengers' backyard instead (with his Infinity Gardening Glove, perhaps). Or maybe Ultron could frugally limit himself to one clone, 'just to have a spare'. Peter and everyone with a letter printed here will receive a copy of *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes*, available on 4K UHD, Blu-ray and DVD from 30 September via 20th Century Studios. Didn't send an address? Email it! Or it'll be a waste of monkey!

MORODER BY NUMBERS

I loved the 10 on-screen classics from Giorgio Moroder piece [*TF* 354] so much that I created a playlist. My favourite is *Together in Electric Dreams*: it was the soundtrack that got me through my PhD in 1985. Amazing that even though the song was quickly put together, it became a monster hit. But I was wondering, what would be the bonus track for your compilation album? My suggestion is *The Dream (Hold On to Your Dream)* by Irene Cara from the lesser-known film *D.C. Cab*, starring Mr. T (remember him?) and written and directed by Joel Schumacher. The playlist is on repeat until the next issue of *Total Film* arrives.

DAMIEN WALMSLEY, SOLIHULL

Our soundtracks supremo Kevin Harley replies: 'For my bonus track, I'd consider *Number One Song in Heaven* from *Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa* or *Zoolander*'s *Love to Love You Baby* (the No Doubt cover – not as good, obvs, but still!). I'd steer clear of anything from *Over the Top*, though…' Oh, and on the subject of Mr. T, Dialogue would like to extend its deepest pity to any fools who don't remember the Rocky-KO-ing, Tiffany's-warehouse-worth-of-jewellery-wearing colossus of mid-80s entertainment.

'Magneto's made off with some more fillings, then'

@ElectClayDavis
[ON *THE BATMAN 2*]
'Who are the villains, please? I need to let my mind feel like it is at least somewhat usefully wandering.'

CONVERSATION STARTER

Thanks for the update on *Cobra Kai* [*TF* 352]. On the way to the Queen's funeral in 2022, I spotted star Martin Kove eating a sandwich in an airport in Dallas and gave him a little salute.

Thanks also for the retrospective on *The Conversation*. My parents, also celebrating their 50th anniversary this year, have some ties to the film. They were friends with Robert Shields, the mime in the opening sequence. What's more, they first met (about a month after the film opened) in the elevator of the Jack Tar Hotel – the setting for the Robert Duvall character's murder!

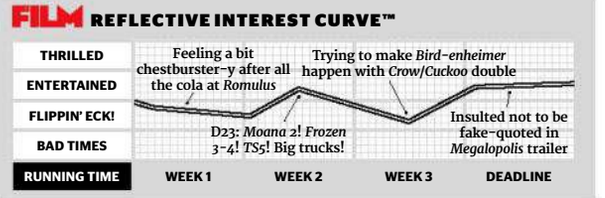
STEPHEN CONN, NEW MEXICO

WHAT YOU MISSED ON THE POD LAST MONTH

Exclusive interviews with Matt Damon, M. Night Shyamalan, Josh Hartnett, Ariana Greenblatt and Fede Alvarez. Our favourite twists! The interquels we'd like to see! Plus spoiler-free reviews and more, every week!

INSIDE FILM

FILM REFLECTIVE INTEREST CURVE™



20TH CENTURY STUDIOS. DISNEY. WARNER. STUDIOCANAL

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

OFFICE SPACED

CHATTER 'GEMS' OVERHEARD IN THE *TOTAL FILM* OFFICE THIS MONTH...

* 'That's it, I'm changing my pet's name to CatXXXine. No one copy me!'
* **'I'm looking forward to *Avatar: Fire and Ash*; I used to love *Men Behaving Badly*'**

MATI PRYJOMKO
[ON *WICKED*]
'Where does this fit into the *John Wick* series?'

Congrats to your parents, Stephen, and cheers for the cool anecdotes. We're always keen to know details of readers' personal connections to the films and TV shows we cover; if you've ever been witness to any criminal-empire-building by aquatic flightless birds, we'd love to hear about it.

ROGUE TRADING

While I was never a fan of George Lucas tinkering with his *Star Wars* films, I wish Disney would make one small change to my favourite instalment of the entire franchise, *Rogue One*. Please digitally 'remedy' the face of General Jan Dodonna! Ian McElhinney, fine actor though he is, looks so different to original star Alex McCrindle that he sticks out like a sore thumb. Perhaps they could also retouch the Grand Moff Tarkin scenes, too, as special effects have vastly improved in the eight years since the film was originally released.
STUART HARDY, SHEFFIELD

It's surely a slippery slope, Stuart. If you upgraded the Tarkin FX to 2024 standards, it would throw into sharp (fuzzy?) relief the 2016-ness of the rest of the movie. And with Alex McCrindle, if we're looking to conjure the faces of 1977, then should Mon Mothma be replaced by an avatar of Farrah Fawcett and K-2SO be wearing a Leo Sayer wig?

NIGHT ERRORS

To be honest, I gave up on M. Night Shyamalan's movies a long time ago, because he just seemed to follow the same formula over and over again: long, boring film with a twist at the end, which we all knew was coming.

So, in honour of the director, the twist at the end of this letter is that I am in fact M. Night Shyamalan! Or am I? I could be... I am not!
OWEN HOLLIFIELD, CAERPHILLY

If you are in fact the renowned filmmaker, you've left it a bit late in the issue to make your customary cameo; we would've expected to see you as Famous Director Lurking on Magazine Spine or Instantly Recognisable Auteur Poorly Disguised as Cover Feature (see page 30!).

YOU CAN ALSO WRITE TO Total Film, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London, W2 6JR (postal addresses will be used for the sole purpose of sending out prizes)

TOTAL FILM

EDITOR
MATT MAYTUM
matt.maytum@futurenet.com @mattmaytum

DEPUTY EDITOR JORDAN FARLEY
jordan.farley@futurenet.com @JordanFarley

REVIEWS EDITOR MATTHEW LEYLAND
matthew.leyland@futurenet.com @totalfilm_mattl

NEWS EDITOR LAUREN MILES
lauren.miles@futurenet.com @lauren_m1les

ART EDITOR ANDY McGREGOR
andy.mcgregor@futurenet.com

EDITOR-AT-LARGE JAMIE GRAHAM
jamie.graham@futurenet.com @jamie_graham9

FILM GROUP
Editor (*SFX*) Darren Scott **Art Editor** Jonathan Coates
Deputy Editor Ian Berriman **Production Editor** Ed Ricketts

CONTRIBUTORS
Cover manipulation and prepress Art Production Hub
Hollywood Correspondent Adam Tanswell
Contributing Editors Paul Bradshaw, Jane Crowther, Kevin Harley, Leila Latif, James Mottram, Neil Smith
Contributors Elizabeth Aubrey, Martyn Conterio, Tom Dawson, Matt Glasby, Joel Harley, Matt Looker, Ken McIntyre, Josh Slater-Williams, Anna Smith, Kate Stables, Gabriel Tate, Anton van Beek
Entertainment Editor, Gamesradar+ Emily Murray
Deputy Entertainment Editor, Gamesradar+ Fay Watson
Senior Entertainment Writer, Gamesradar+ Bradley Russell
Senior Entertainment Writer, Gamesradar+ Lauren Milici
Entertainment Writer, Gamesradar+ Molly Edwards
Photography Alamy, David Levene/*Guardian*/Eyevine, Clara Molden/Camera Press, Getty Images
Thanks to Rhian Drinkwater, Laura Eddy, Ian Farrington, Richard Hill, Cliff Hope, Heather Seabrook, Matt Yates (Production)
Cover image Courtesy of Warner Bros

ADVERTISING
Media packs are available on request. Please contact Rosie Liddington.
Commercial Director Clare Dove clare.dove@futurenet.com
Head of Commercial Jon Restall jon.restall@futurenet.com
Account Manager, Gaming & Film Rosie Liddington rosie.liddington@futurenet.com

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING
Total Film is available for licensing and syndication. To find out more, contact us at licensing@futurenet.com or view our available content at www.futurecontenthub.com
Head of Print Licensing Rachel Shaw

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Orders **0330 333 1113** (from UK) or **+44 330 333 1113** (from overseas)
Online enquiries **www.magazinesdirect.com** Email **help@magazinesdirect.com**

Total Film (ISSN 1366-3135 USPS 23870) is published monthly with an extra issue in April by Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK. BAR subscription prices are £71.50 for UK, €153 for Europe, $173 for US, £133 for Rest of World. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., co BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn Brooklyn NY 11256. US POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Total Film*, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container Inc., 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at Future Publishing, co Air Business Subscriptions, Rockwood House, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH, UK.
If you are an active subscriber, you have instant access to past issues through your iOS or Android device/s. You will only be able to access the digital past issues as long as you are an active subscriber. To purchase single past issues (print format only) visit: magazinesdirect.com (click on 'Single issues' tab) or email: help@magazinesdirect.com
Manage your subscription online with MyMagazine. Visit www.mymagazine.co.uk/FAQ to view frequently asked questions or log in at www.mymagazine.co.uk
Magazinesdirect.com is owned and operated by Future Publishing Limited.

MARKETING AND CIRCULATION
Global Trade Marketing Director Victoria Chappell
Head of Subscriptions Sharon Todd
Newstrade Director Ben Oakden

PRINT, PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION
Production Manager Frances Twentyman
Head of Production, UK & US Mark Constance
Production Project Manager Clare Scott
Senior Ad Production Manager Jo Crosby
Ad Production Coordinator Emma Thomas
Digital Editions Controller Jason Hudson
Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons, on behalf of Future
Distributed by Marketforce UK, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR mfcommunications@futurenet.com

MANAGEMENT
Managing Director, TV & Film Matthew Pierce
SVP Consumer Kevin Addley
Head of Art & Design Rodney Dive
Editorial Production Manager Stuart Dade
Director of Group Finance Oli Foster

All contents © 2024 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.

ISSN Total Film 1366-3135

We encourage you to recycle this magazine, either through your household recyclable waste collection service or at a recycling site. We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards.

ipso. Regulated | Widely Recycled

21,048 (Jan-Dec 2023)
14,355 Print
6,693 Digital

abc

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer Jon Steinberg
Non-Executive Chairman Richard Huntingford
Chief Financial Officer Sharjeel Suleman

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

Total Film is a member of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (which regulates the UK's magazine and newspaper industry). We abide by the Editors' Code of Practice and are committed to upholding the highest standards of journalism.

If you think that we have not met those standards and want to make a complaint please contact totalfilm@futurenet.com.
If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk.

SPOILER ALERT!

60 SECOND SCREENPLAY

TF SAVES YOU THE COST OF A MOVIE EVERY MONTH. THIS ISSUE: **TWISTERS**...

WORDS MATT LOOKER

FADE IN:

EXT. FIELD, OKLAHOMA
DAISY EDGAR-JONES and her student friends try to collapse a tornado. Despite her near-psychic ability to predict them, this tornado is bigger than normal and it kills her helpers.

DAISY EDGAR-JONES
Maybe these giant, raging vortexes of destruction are actually quite scary?

INT. NEW YORK OFFICE – FIVE YEARS LATER
ANTHONY RAMOS, the only other survivor, now has fancy tornado-scanning equipment. He asks DAISY EDGAR-JONES for help. She agrees and they travel back to Oklahoma.

GLEN POWELL
Yee-haw! I'm a rootin', tootin' tornado-wrangling cowboy and an influencer. I'm here to get me some YouTube content!

DAISY EDGAR-JONES
You seem insufferable, and yet there's a spark between us. While these cyclones destroy towns and lives, let's turn this into a fun competition.

Both teams race towards a tornado, but DAISY EDGAR-JONES suffers a PTSD flashback. GLEN POWELL drives right into the centre to set off some fireworks. For fun.

GLEN POWELL
Yee-haw! That's some great viral content! Goddamn, I can tell that Daisy Edgar-Jones sure does know her storms and clouds, though.

EXT: MOTEL
Both teams check into a motel, where DAISY EDGAR-JONES and GLEN POWELL exchange flirty insults. The next morning, ANTHONY RAMOS has a meeting with a suspicious investor.

DAISY EDGAR-JONES
There's a cloud over there. That might become a tornado. But there's another cloud in the opposite direction and that might also become a tornado.

They both race off. GLEN POWELL chooses the wrong cloud, but DAISY EDGAR-JONES guesses correctly. While ANTHONY RAMOS scans the tornado, some equipment gets blown away.

ANTHONY RAMOS
Well, who could know that might happen? To scan a tornado, I really need it to stay perfectly still, but they famously don't do that.

EXT: RODEO SHOW
GLEN POWELL takes DAISY EDGAR-JONES to a rodeo to prove he is a normal guy who does normal things. Another tornado immediately strikes. ANTHONY RAMOS arrives once it is safe.

ANTHONY RAMOS
What were you doing with him?

DAISY EDGAR-JONES
He's a good guy! Meanwhile, I found out that your investor profits from the tornado victims, so maybe you're a bad guy? This is quite the role reversal.

She drives to her family home in Sapulpa. GLEN POWELL immediately shows up and reads her old college coursework. They agree to reattempt her experiment. It fails again, but at least no one dies this time.

DAISY EDGAR-JONES
I'm sorry for what I said, Anthony Ramos, and for getting our friends killed. Could you give me all the data from your scanners?

ANTHONY RAMOS
I basically used to be in love with you, so sure.

EXT: FIELD
Somehow the data shows that they need to make it rain inside the tornado to collapse it. They decide to do this with fireworks. Suddenly a new tornado starts destroying the entire town.

GLEN POWELL
Run! Everyone get to safety!

ANTHONY RAMOS
They live here. There's been at least six tornadoes in this movie, let alone countless others before it. I'm pretty sure they know what to do.

The townspeople take refuge in a cinema where they can't avoid the mayhem. THE AUDIENCE sympathises. DAISY EDGAR-JONES makes it rain and the tornado dissipates.

GLEN POWELL
Wow, well done! You have basically now invented a cure for tornadoes! I wonder how they'll write around that in the sequel.

INT: AIRPORT
DAISY EDGAR-JONES leaves for New York to pitch to new investors for ANTHONY RAMOS. GLEN POWELL chases after her, but her flight is delayed anyway due to storms.

DAISY EDGAR-JONES
I probably should have been able to predict that. I've been able to predict everything else in this film.

THE AUDIENCE
We know the feeling.

FIN

NEXT ISSUE: BORDERLANDS

WARNER BROS.

NEXT ISSUE
ON SALE 10 OCTOBER

SUBSCRIBE TODAY
AND ENJOY GREAT SAVINGS!
See page 40 for details

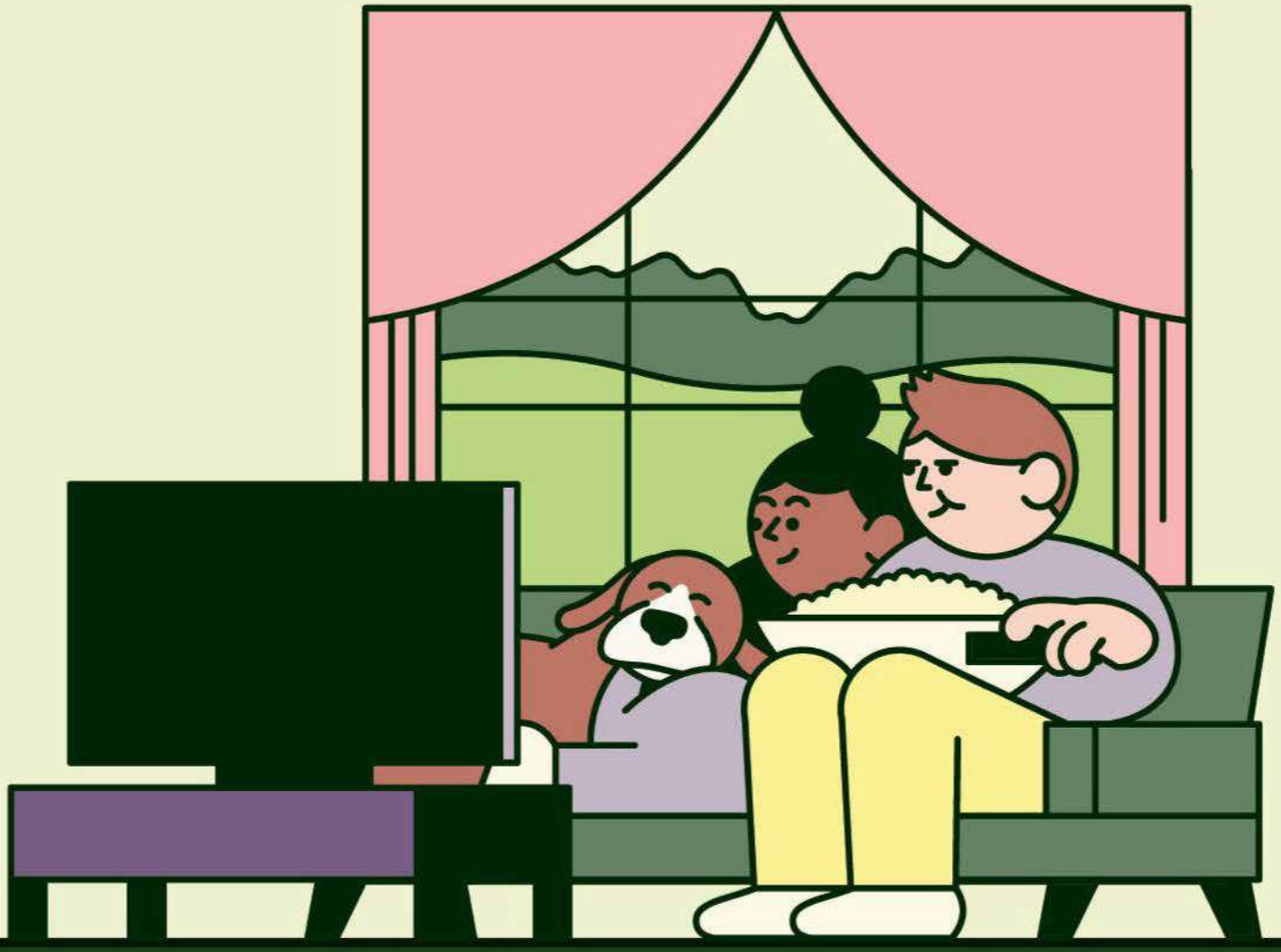
FREE GIFT

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

Advertisement

SAVVY SAVERS, STEP THIS WAY.

Discover cover options for car, home and travel insurance, plus broadband and more.



GO. COMPARE

Get more information and compare quotes at Go.Compare.

Films in Concert at the **Royal Albert Hall**

Top Gun: Maverick // Ghostbusters // Avatar // Gladiator //
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows™ Part 2 // Home Alone

BOOK NOW

Avatar Live in Concert is a production of Avex Classics International.

9001

9000